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ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

FALL
WINTER
1972

EDITED BY

"Ellery Queen"

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Dear Reader:

This is the 24th in *EQMM's* series of original paperback anthologies, now published twice a year...

Once again the contents derive from three 'tec sources. First, one short novel, two novelets, and three short stories about world-famous series detectives such as

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From France, in the Gallic 'tec tradition of Emile Gaboriau, Gaston Leroux, and Maurice Leblanc, we bring you Georges Simenon.

And from the United States, in the American 'tec tradition of Edgar Allan Poe, Jacques Futrelle, and Melville Davisson Post, we bring you, among others, Rex Stout, James M. Cain, Rufus King, Philip Wylie, Lawrence Treat, and Robert L. Fish.

Thus, three sources — analytical, classical, and geographical...

This 24th anthology went on sale September 14, 1972, and early in March 1973 we will publish Volume 25. For this 25th Anniversary Edition we are already planning something "special," something new in this paperback series.

So we wish you, in Charles Dickens' wondrous phrase, great expectations, and in the meanwhile we offer you great cogitations, great confrontations, and great excitations.

Happy reading!

ELLERY QUEEN

Rex Stout

The Dazzle Dan Murder Case

Like so many of Nero Wolfe's cases, this one looked simple and ordinary; but like so many of Nero Wolfe's cases, it proved anything but—before you could say Archie Goodwin, the case became complicated and extraordinary. And like all of Nero Wolfe's cases, it parades a fascinating cast of characters: Harry Koven, the curiously indecisive creator of Dazzle Dan, famous comic-strip hero; his much younger wife; a strange little man called Squirt; Koven's Girl Friday, his agent and business manager; the two artists who actually drew Dazzle Dan; and last but definitely not least, a tropical monkey called Rookaloo.

Near the end of this short novel, complete in this anthology, and just before the denouement, Archie thinks that Nero Wolfe's efforts are "far from one of his best performances"—in a case "where nothing less than his best would do." Well, Archie has eaten his words before: Nero Wolfe triumphs again! . . .

Detectives: NERO WOLFE and ARCHIE GOODWIN

I was doing two things at once. With my hands I was getting my armpit holster and the Marley .32 from a drawer of my desk, and with my tongue I was giving Nero Wolfe a lecture on economics.

"The most you can hope to soak him," I stated, "is five hundred bucks. Deduct a C for overhead and another C for

expenses incurred, that leaves three hundred. Eighty-five per cent for income tax will leave you with forty-five bucks clear for the wear and tear on your brain and my legs, not to mention the risk. That wouldn't buy—"

"Risk of what?" He muttered that only to be courteous, to show that he had heard what

THE DAZZLE DAN MURDER CASE

I said, though actually he wasn't listening. Seated behind his desk, he was scowling, not at me but at the crossword puzzle in the *London Times*.

"Complications," I said darkly. "You heard him explain it. Playing games with a gun is sappy." I was contorted, buckling the strap of the holster. That done, I picked up my coat. "Since you're listed in the red book as a detective, and since I draw pay, such as it is, as your licensed assistant, I'm all for detecting for people on request. But this bozo wants to do it himself, using our firearm as a prop. We might just as well send it up to him by messenger."

"Pfui," Wolfe muttered. "It is a thoroughly conventional proceeding. You are merely out of humor because you don't like Dazzle Dan. If it were Pleistocene Polly you would be zealous."

"Nuts. I look at the comics occasionally just to be cultured. It wouldn't hurt any if you did."

I went to the hall for my things, let myself out, descended the stoop, and headed toward Tenth Avenue for a taxi. A cold gusty wind came at my back from across the Hudson, and I made it brisk, swinging my arms, to get my blood going.

It was true that I did not care for Dazzle Dan, the hero of the comic strip that was syndicated to two thousand newspapers—or was it two million?—throughout the land. Also I did not care for his creator, Harry Koven, who had called at the office Saturday evening, forty hours ago. He had kept chewing his upper lip with jagged yellow teeth, and it had seemed to me that he might at least have chewed the lower lip instead of the upper, which doesn't show teeth. Moreover, I had not cared for his job as he outlined it. Not that I was getting snooty about the renown of Nero Wolfe—a guy who has had a gun lifted has got as much right to buy good detective work as a rich duchess accused of murder—but the way this Harry Koven had programmed it he was going to do the detecting himself, so the only difference between me and a messenger boy was that I was taking a taxi instead of the subway.

Anyhow Wolfe had taken the job and there I was. I pulled a slip of paper from my pocket, typed on by me from notes taken of the talk with Harry Koven, and gave it a look.

MARCELLE KOVEN, wife
ADRIAN GETZ, friend or

campfollower, maybe both PATRICA LOWELL, agent (manager?), promoter PETE JORDAN, artist, draws Dazzle Dan BYRAM HILDEBRAND, artist, also draws D.D.

One of those five, according to Harry Koven, had stolen his gun, a Marley .32, and he wanted to know which one. As he had told it, that was all there was to it, but it was a cinch that if the missing object had been an electric shaver or a pair of cuff links it would not have called for all that lip-chewing, not to mention other signs of strain. He had gone out of his way, not once but twice, to declare that he had no reason to suspect any of the five of wanting to do any shooting. The second time he had made it so emphatic that Wolfe had grunted and I had lifted a brow.

Since a Marley .32 is by no means a collector's item, it was no great coincidence that there was one in our arsenal and that therefore we were equipped to furnish Koven with the prop he wanted for his performance. As for the performance itself, the judicious thing to do was wait and see; but there was no point in being judicious about something I didn't like, so I had already checked it off as a dud.

I dismissed the taxi at the

address on Seventy-sixth Street, east of Lexington Avenue. The house had had its front done over for the current century, unlike Nero Wolfe's old brownstone on West Thirty-fifth Street, which still sported the same front stoop it had started with. To enter this one you went down four steps instead of up seven, and I did so, after noting the pink shutters at the windows of all four floors and the tubs of evergreens flanking the entrance.

I was let in by a maid in uniform, with a pug nose and lipstick about as thick as Wolfe spreads Camembert on a wafer. I told her I had an appointment with Mr. Koven. She said Mr. Koven was not yet available and seemed to think that settled it, making me no offer for my hat and coat.

I said, "Our old brownstone, run by men only, is run better. When Fritz or I admit someone with an appointment we take his things."

"What's your name?" she demanded in a tone indicating that she doubted if I had one.

A loud male voice came from somewhere within. "Is that the man from Furnari's?"

A loud female voice came from up above. "Cora, is that my dress?"

I called out, "It's Archie Goodwin, expected by Mr.

Koven at noon! It is now two minutes past twelve!"

That got action. The female voice, not quite so loud, told me to come up. The maid, looking frustrated, beat it. I took off my coat and put it on a chair, and my hat. A man came through a doorway at the rear of the hall and approached, speaking.

"More noise. Noisiest damn place. Up this way." He started up the stairs. "When you have an appointment with Sir Harry, always add an hour."

I followed him. At the top of the flight there was a large square hall with wide archways to rooms at right and left. He led me through the one at the left.

There are few rooms I can't take in at a glance, but that was one of them. Two huge TV cabinets, a monkey in a cage in a corner, chairs of all sizes and colors, rugs overlapping, a fireplace blazing away, the temperature around eighty—I gave it up and focused on the inhabitant. That was not only simpler but pleasanter. She was smaller than I would specify by choice, but otherwise acceptable, especially the wide smooth brow above the serious gray eyes, and the cheekbones. She must have been part salamander, to look so cool and silky in that oven.

"Dearest Pete," she said, "you are going to stop calling my husband Sir Harry."

I admired that as a time-saver. Instead of the usual pronouncement of names, she let me know that she was Marcelle, Mrs. Harry Koven, and that the young man was Pete Jordan, and at the same time told him something.

Pete Jordan walked across to her as for a purpose. He might have been going to take her in his arms or slap her or anything in between. But a pace short of her he stopped.

"You're wrong," he told her in his aggressive baritone. "It's according to plan. It's the only way I can prove I'm not a louse. No one but a louse would stick at this, doing this junk month after month, and here look at me just because I like to eat. I haven't got the guts to quit and starve a while, so I call him Sir Harry to make you sore, working myself up to calling him something that will make him sore, and eventually I'll come to a boil and figure out a way to make Getz sore, and then I'll get bounced and I can start starving and be an artist. It's a plan."

He turned and glared at me. "I'm more apt to go through with it if I announce it in front of a witness. You're the witness. My name's Pete Jordan."

He shouldn't have tried glaring because he wasn't built for it. He wasn't much bigger than Mrs. Koven, and he had narrow shoulders and broad hips. An aggressive baritone and a defiant glare coming from that make-up just couldn't have the effect he was after. He needed coaching.

"You have already made me sore," she told his back in a nice low voice, but not a weak one. "You act like a brat and you're too old to be a brat. Why not grow up?"

He wheeled and snapped at her, "I look on you as a mother!"

That was a foul. They were both younger than me, and she couldn't have had more than three or four years on him.

I spoke. "Excuse me," I said, "but I am not a professional witness. I came to see Mr. Koven at his request. Shall I go hunt for him?"

A thin squeak came from behind me. "Good morning, Mrs. Koven. Am I early?"

As she answered I turned for a look at the owner of the squeak, who was advancing from the archway. He should have traded voices with Pete Jordan. He had both the size and presence for a deep baritone, with a well-made head topped by a healthy mat of gray hair nearly white. Every-

thing about him was impressive and masterful, including the way he carried himself, but the squeak spoiled it completely. It continued as he joined us.

"I heard Mr. Goodwin, and Pete left, so I thought—"

Mrs. Koven and Pete were both talking, too, and it didn't seem worth the effort to sort it out, especially when the monkey decided to join in and started chattering. Also I could feel sweat coming on my forehead and neck, over-dressed as I was with a coat and vest, since Pete and the newcomer were in shirt sleeves. I couldn't follow their example without displaying my holster. They kept it up, including the monkey, ignoring me completely but informing me incidentally that the squeaker was not Adrian Getz as I had first supposed, but Byram Hildebrand, Pete's coworker in the grind of drawing Dazzle Dan.

It was all very informal and homey, but I was starting to sizzle and I crossed to the far side of the room and opened a window wide. I expected an immediate reaction but got none. Disappointed at that but relieved by the rush of fresh air, I filled my chest, used my handkerchief on the brow and neck, turned, saw that we had company.

Coming through the archway

was a pink-cheeked creature in a mink coat with a dark green slab of cork or something perched on her brown hair at a cocky slant. With no one bothering to glance at her except me, she moved across toward the fireplace, slid the coat off onto a couch, displaying a tricky plaid suit with an assortment of restrained colors, and said in a throaty voice that carried without being raised, "Rookaloo will be dead in an hour."

They were all shocked into silence except the monkey. Mrs. Koven looked around, saw the open window, and demanded, "Who did that?"

"I did," I said manfully.

Byram Hildebrand strode to the window like a general in front of troops and pulled it shut. The monkey stopped talking and started to cough.

"Listen to him," Pete Jordan said. His baritone mellowed when he was pleased. "Pneumonia already! That's an idea! That's what I'll do when I work up to making Getz sore."

Three of them went to the cage to take a look at Rookaloo, not bothering to greet or thank her who had come just in time to save the monkey's life. She stepped to me, asking cordially, "You're Archie Goodwin? I'm Pat Lowell." She put out a hand,

and I took it. She had talent as a handclasper and backed it up with a good straight look out of clear brown eyes. "I was going to phone you this morning to warn you that Mr. Koven is never ready on time for an appointment, but he arranged this himself so I didn't."

"Never again," I told her, "pass up an excuse for phoning me."

"I won't." She took her hand back and glanced at her wrist. "You're early anyway. He told us the conference would be at twelve thirty."

"I was to come at twelve."

"Oh." She was taking me in—nothing offensive, but she sure was rating me. "To talk with him first?"

I shrugged. "I guess so."

She nodded, frowning a little. "This is a new one on me. I've been his agent and manager for three years now, handling all his business, everything from endorsements of cough drops to putting Dazzle Dan on scooters, and this is the first time a thing like this has happened, him getting someone in for a conference without consulting me—and Nero Wolfe, no less! I understand it's about a tie-up of Nero Wolfe and Dazzle Dan, having Dan start a detective agency?"

I put that question mark there, though her inflection left

it to me whether to call it a question or merely a statement. I was caught off guard, so it probably showed on my face—my glee at the prospect of telling Wolfe about a tie-up between him and Dazzle Dan.

"We'd better wait," I said discreetly, "and let Mr. Koven tell it. As I understand it, I'm only here as a technical adviser, representing Mr. Wolfe because he never goes out on business. Of course you would handle the business end, and if that means you and I will have to have a lot of talks—"

I stopped because I had lost her. Her eyes were aimed past my left shoulder toward the archway, and their expression had suddenly and completely changed. They weren't exactly more alive or alert, but more concentrated. I turned, and there was Harry Koven crossing to us. His mop of black hair hadn't been combed, and he hadn't shaved. His big frame was enclosed in a red silk robe embroidered with yellow Dazzle Dans. A little guy in a dark blue suit was with him, at his elbow.

"Good morning, my little dazzlers!" Koven boomed.

"It seems cool in here," the little guy said in a gentle worried voice.

In some mysterious way the gentle little voice seemed to

make more noise than the big boom. Certainly it was the gentle little voice that chopped off the return greetings from the dazzlers, but it could have been the combination of the two, the big man and the small one, that had so abruptly changed the atmosphere of the room. Before they had all been screwy perhaps, but all free and easy; now they were all tightened up. They even seemed to be tongue-tied, so I spoke.

"I opened a window," I said.

"Good heavens," the little guy mildly reproached me and trotted over to the monkey's cage. Mrs. Koven and Pete Jordan were in his path, and they hastily moved out of it, as if afraid of getting trampled, though he didn't look up to trampling anything bigger than a cricket. Not only was he too little and too old, but also he was vaguely deformed and trotted with a jerk.

Koven boomed at me, "So you got here! Don't mind the Squirt and his damn monkey. He loves that damn monkey. I call this the steam room." He let out a laugh. "How is it, Squirt, okay?"

"I think so, Harry. I hope so." The low gentle voice filled the room again.

"I hope so, too, or God help Goodwin." Koven turned on Byram Hildebrand. "Has seven

twenty-eight come, By?"

"No," Hildebrand squeaked. "I phoned Furnari, and he said it would be right over."

"Late again. We may have to change. When it comes, do a revise on the third frame. Where Dan says, 'Not tonight, my dear,' make it, 'Not today, my dear.' Got it?"

"But we discussed that—"

"I know, but change it. We'll change seven twenty-nine to fit. Have you finished seven thirty-three?"

"No. It's only—"

"Then what are you doing up here?"

"Why, Goodwin came, and you said you wanted us at twelve thirty—"

"I'll let you know when we're ready—sometime after lunch. Show me the revise on seven twenty-eight." Koven glanced around masterfully. "How is everybody? Blooming? See you all later. Come along, Goodwin, sorry you had to wait. Come with me."

He headed for the archway and I followed, across the hall and up the next flight of stairs. There the arrangement was different; instead of a big square hall there was a narrow corridor with four doors, all closed. He turned left, to the door at that end, opened it, held it for me to pass through, and shut it again. This room

was an improvement in several ways: it was ten degrees cooler, it had no monkey, and the furniture left more room to move around. The most prominent item was a big old scarred desk over by a window. After inviting me to sit, Koven went to the desk and removed covers from dishes that were there on a tray.

"Breakfast," he said. "You had yours."

It wasn't a question, but I said yes to be sociable. He needed all the sociability he could get, from the looks of the tray. There was one dejected poached egg, one wavy thin piece of toast, three undersized prunes with about a teaspoonful of juice, a split of tonic water, and a glass. It was an awful sight. He waded into the prunes. When they were gone he poured the tonic water into the glass, took a sip, and demanded, "Did you bring it?"

"The gun? Sure."

"Let me see it."

"It's the one we showed you at the office." I moved to another chair, closer to him. "I'm supposed to check with you before we proceed. Is that the desk you kept your gun in?"

He nodded and swallowed a nibble of toast. "Here in this left-hand drawer, in the back."

"Loaded."

"Yes. I told you so."

"So you did. You also told us that you bought it two years ago in Montana, when you were there at a dude ranch, and brought it home with you and never bothered to get a license for it, and it's been there in the drawer right along. You saw it there a week or ten days ago, and last Friday you saw it was gone. You didn't want to call the cops for two reasons, because you have no license for it, and because you think it was taken by one of the five people whose names you gave—"

"I think it *may* have been."

"You didn't put it like that. However, skip it. You gave us the five names. By the way, was that Adrian Getz, the one you called Squirt?"

"Yes."

"Then they're all five here, and we can go ahead and get it over with. As I understand it, I am to put my gun there in the drawer where yours was, and you get them up here for a conference, with me present. You were to cook up something to account for me. Have you done that?"

He swallowed another nibble of toast and egg. Wolfe would have had that meal down in five seconds flat—or rather, he would have had it out the window. "I thought this might do," Koven said. "I can say that

I'm considering a new stunt for Dan, have him start a detective agency, and I've called Nero Wolfe in for consultation, and he sent you up for a conference. We can discuss it a little, and I ask you to show us how a detective searches a room to give us an idea of the picture potential. You shouldn't start with the desk; start maybe with the shelves back of me. When you come to do the desk I'll push my chair back to be out of your way, and I'll have them right in front of me. When you open the drawer and take the gun out and they see it—"

"I thought you were going to do that."

"I know, that's what I said, but this is better because this way they'll be looking at the gun and you, and I'll be watching their faces. I'll have my eye right on them, and the one that took my gun, if one of them did it—when he or she suddenly sees you pull a gun out of the drawer that's exactly like it, it's going to show on his face, and I'm going to see it. We'll do it that way."

I admit it sounded better there on the spot than it had in Wolfe's office—and besides, he had revised it. This way he might really get what he wanted.

"It sounds all right," I conceded, "except for one

thing. You'll be expecting a look of surprise, but what if there are five looks of surprise? At seeing me take a gun out of your desk—those who don't know you had a gun there."

"But they do know."

"All of them?"

"Certainly. I thought I told you that. Anyhow, they all know. Everybody knows everything around this place. They thought I ought to get rid of it, and now I wish I had. You understand, Goodwin, all there is to this—I just want to know where the damn thing is, I want to know who took it, and I'll handle it myself from there. I told Wolfe that."

"I know you did." I got up and went to his side of the desk, at his left, and pulled a drawer open. "In here?"

"Yes."

"The rear compartment?"

"Yes."

I reached to my holster for the Marley, broke it, removed the cartridges, and dropped them into my vest pocket, put the gun in the drawer, shut the drawer, and returned to my chair.

"Okay," I said, "get them up here. We can ad lib it all right without any rehearsing."

He looked at me. He opened the drawer for a peek at the gun, not touching it, and pushed the drawer to.

"I'm going to have to get my nerve up," he said, as if appealing to me. "I'm never much good until late afternoon."

I grunted. "What the hell. You told me to be here at noon and called the conference for twelve thirty."

"I know I did. I do things like that. And I've got to dress." Suddenly his voice went high in protest. "Don't try to rush me, understand?"

I was fed up, but had already invested a lot of time and a dollar for a taxi, so kept calm. "I know," I told him, "artists are temperamental. But I'll explain how Mr. Wolfe charges. He sets a fee, depending on the job, and if it takes more of my time than he thinks reasonable he adds an extra hundred dollars an hour. Keeping me here until late afternoon would be expensive. I could go and come back."

He didn't like that and said so, explaining why, the idea being that with me there in the house it would be easier for him to get his nerve up and it might only take an hour or so. He got up and walked to the door and opened it, then turned and demanded, "Do you know how much I make an hour? The time I spend on my work? More than a thousand an hour! I'll go get some clothes on."

He went, shutting the door. My wrist watch said 1:17. My stomach agreed. I sat maybe ten minutes, then went to the phone on the desk, dialed, got Wolfe, and told him how it was. He told me to go out and get some lunch, naturally, and I said I would, but after hanging up I went back to my chair. If I went out, sure as hell Koven would get his nerve up in my absence, and by the time I got back he would have lost it again and have to start over. I explained the situation to my stomach, and it made a polite sound of protest, but I was the boss. I was glancing at my watch again and seeing 1:42 when the door opened and Mrs. Koven was with me.

When I stood, her serious gray eyes beneath the wide smooth brow were level with the knot in my four-in-hand. She said her husband had told her that I was staying for a conference at a later hour. I confirmed it. She said I ought to have something to eat. I agreed that it was not a bad notion.

"Won't you," she invited, "come down and have a sandwich with us? We don't do any cooking, we even have our breakfast sent in, but there are some sandwiches."

"I don't want to be rude," I told her, "but are they in the

room with the monkey?"

"Oh, no." She stayed serious. "Wouldn't that be awful? Downstairs in the workroom. Come on, do."

I went downstairs with her.

In a large room at the rear on the ground floor the other four suspects were seated around a plain wooden table, dealing with the sandwiches. The room was a mess—drawing tables under fluorescent lights, open shelves crammed with papers, cans of all sizes, and miscellaneous objects, chairs scattered around, other shelves with books and portfolios, and tables with more stacks of papers. Messy as it was to the eye, it was even messier to the ear, for two radios were going full blast.

Marcelle Koven and I joined them at the lunch table, and I perked up at once. There was a basket of French bread and pumpernickel, paper platters piled with slices of ham, smoked turkey, sturgeon, and hot corned beef, a big slab of butter, mustard and other accessories, bottles of milk, a pot of steaming coffee, and a one-pound jar of fresh caviar. Seeing Pete Jordan spooning caviar onto a piece of bread crust, I got what he meant about liking to eat.

"Help yourself!" Pat Lowell yelled into my ear.

THE DAZZLE DAN MURDER CASE

I reached for the bread with one hand and the corned beef with the other and yelled back, "Why doesn't someone turn them down or even off?"

She took a sip of coffee from a paper cup and shook her head. "One's By Hildebrand's and one's Pete Jordan's! They like different programs when they're working! They have to go for volume!"

It was a hell of a din, but the corned beef was wonderful and the bread must have been from Rusterman's, nor was there anything wrong with the turkey and sturgeon. Since the radio duel precluded table talk, I used my eyes for diversion and was impressed by Adrian Getz, whom Koven called the Squirt. He would break off a rectangle of bread crust, place a rectangle of sturgeon on it, arrange a mound of caviar on top, and pop it in. When it was down he would take three sips of coffee and then start over. He was doing that when Mrs. Koven and I arrived and he was still doing it when I was full and reaching for another paper napkin.

Eventually, though, he stopped. He pushed back his chair, left it, went over to a sink at the wall, held his fingers under the faucet, and dried them with his handkerchief. Then he trotted over to a radio and

turned it off, and to the other one and turned that off. Then he trotted back to us and spoke apologetically.

"That was uncivil, I know." No one contradicted him.

"It was only," he went on, "that I wanted to ask Mr. Goodwin something before going up for my nap." His eyes settled on me. "Did you know when you opened that window that sudden cold drafts are dangerous for tropical monkeys?"

His tone was more than mild, it was wistful. But something about him—I didn't know what and didn't ask for time to go into it—got my goat.

"Sure," I said cheerfully. "I was trying it out."

"That was thoughtless," he said, not complaining, just giving his modest opinion, and turned and trotted out of the room.

There was a strained silence. Pat Lowell reached for the pot to pour some coffee.

"Goodwin, God help you," Pete Jordan muttered.

"Why? Does he sting?"

"Don't ask me why, but watch your step. I think he's a kobold." He tossed his paper napkin onto the table. "Want to see an artist create? Come and look." He marched to one of the radios and turned it on, then to a drawing table and sat.

"I'll clean up," Pat Lowell offered.

Byram Hildebrand, who had not squeaked once that I heard, went and turned on the other radio before he took his place at another drawing table.

Mrs. Koven left us. I helped Pat Lowell clear up the lunch table, but all that did was pass time, since both radios were going and I rely mostly on talk to develop an acquaintance in the early stages. Then she left, and I strolled over to watch the artists. So far nothing had occurred to change my opinion of Dazzle Dan, but I had to admire the way they did him. Working from rough sketches which all looked alike to me, they turned out the finished product in three colors so fast I could barely keep up, walking back and forth. The only interruptions for a long stretch were when Hildebrand jumped up to go and turn his radio louder, and a minute later Pete Jordan did likewise. I sat down and concentrated on the experiment of listening to two stations at once, but after a while my brain started to curdle and I got out of there.

A door toward the front of the lower hall was standing open, and I stepped inside when I saw Pat Lowell at a desk, working. She looked up to nod and went on working.

"Listen a minute," I said. "We're here on a desert island, and for months you have been holding me at arm's length, and I'm desperate. It is not mere propinquity. In rags and tatters as you are, without make-up, I have come to look upon you—"

"I'm busy," she said emphatically. "Go play with a coconut."

"You'll regret this," I said savagely and went to the hall and looked through the glass of the front door at the outside world. The view was nothing to brag about, and the radios were still at my eardrums, so I went upstairs. Looking through the archway into the room at the left, and seeing no one but the monkey in its cage, I crossed to the other room and entered. It was full of furniture, but there was no sign of life. As I went up the second flight of stairs it seemed that the sound of the radios was getting louder instead of softer, and at the top I knew why. A radio was going the other side of one of the closed doors.

I went and opened the door to the room where I had talked with Koven; not there. I tried another door and was faced by shelves stacked with linen. I knocked on another, got no response, opened it, and stepped in. It was a large bedroom, very fancy, with an

over-sized bed. The furniture and fittings showed that it was co-ed. A radio on a stand was giving with a soap opera, and stretched out on a couch was Mrs. Koven, sound asleep. She looked softer and not so serious, with her lips parted a little and relaxed fingers curled on the cushion, in spite of the yapping radio on the bedside table.

I damn well intended to find Koven, and took a couple of steps with a vague notion of looking under the bed for him, when a glance through an open door at the right into the next room discovered him. He was standing at a window with his back to me. Thinking it might seem a little familiar on short acquaintance for me to enter from the bedroom where his wife was snoozing, I backed out to the hall, pulling the door to, moved to the next door, and knocked. Getting no reaction, I turned the knob and entered.

The radio had drowned out my noise. He remained at the window. I banged the door shut. He jerked around. He said something, but I didn't get it on account of the radio. I went and closed the door to the bedroom, and that helped some.

"Well?" he demanded, as if he couldn't imagine who I was or what I wanted.

He had shaved and combed and had on a well-made brown homespun suit, with a tan shirt and red tie.

"It's going on four o'clock," I said, "and I'll be going soon and taking my gun with me."

He took his hands from his pockets and dropped into a chair. Evidently this was the Koven personal living room, from the way it was furnished, and it looked fairly livable.

He spoke. "I was standing at the window thinking."

"Yeah. Any luck?"

He sighed and stretched his legs out. "Fame and fortune," he said, "are not all a man needs for happiness."

"What else would you suggest?" I asked brightly.

He undertook to tell me. He went on and on, but I won't report it verbatim because I doubt if it contained any helpful hints for you—I know it didn't for me. I grunted from time to time to be polite. I listened to him for a while and then got a little relief by listening to the soap opera on the radio, which was muffled some by the closed door but by no means inaudible. Eventually, of course, he got around to his wife, first briefing me by explaining that she was his third and they had been married only two years. To my surprise he didn't tear her apart. He said

she was wonderful. His point was that even when you added to fame and fortune the companionship of a beloved and loving wife who was fourteen years younger than you, that still wasn't all you needed for happiness.

There was one interruption—a knock on the door and the appearance of Byram Hildebrand. He had come to show the revise on the third frame of Number 728. They discussed art some, and Koven okayed the revise, and Hildebrand departed. I hoped that the intermission had sidetracked Koven, but no; he took up again where he had left off.

I can take a lot when I'm working on a case, even a kindergarten problem like that one, but finally, after the twentieth sidewise glance at my wrist, I called a halt.

"Look," I said, "this has given me a new slant on life, and don't think I don't appreciate it, but it's a quarter past four and it's getting dark. I would call it late afternoon. What do you say we go ahead with our act?"

He closed his trap and frowned at me. He started chewing his lip. After some of that he suddenly arose, went to a cabinet, and got out a bottle.

"Will you join me?" He produced two glasses. "I'm not

supposed to drink until five o'clock, but I'll make this an exception." He came to me. "Bourbon all right? Say when."

I would have liked to plug him. He had known from the beginning that he would have to drink himself up to it but had sucked me in with a noon appointment. Anything I felt like saying would have been justified, but I held in. I accepted mine and raised it with him, to encourage him, and took a swallow. He took a dainty sip, raised his eyes to the ceiling, then emptied the glass at a gulp. He picked up the bottle and poured a refill.

"Why don't we go in there with the refreshment," I suggested, "and go over it a little?"

"Don't rush me," he said gloomily. He took a deep breath, swelling his chest, and suddenly grinned at me, showing the teeth. He lifted the glass and drained it, reached for the bottle and tilted it to pour, and changed his mind.

"Come on," he said, heading for the door. I stepped around him to open the door, since both his hands were occupied, closed it behind us, and followed him down the hall. At the farther end we entered the room where we were to stage it. He went to the desk and sat, poured himself a drink, and put the bottle down. I went to the

desk, too, but not to sit. I had taken the precaution of removing the cartridges from my gun, but even so a glance at it wouldn't hurt any. I pulled the drawer open and was relieved to see that it was still there. I shut the drawer.

"I'll go get them," I offered.

"I said don't rush me," Koven protested, but no longer gloomy.

Thinking that two more drinks would surely do it, I moved to a chair. But I didn't sit. Something wasn't right, and it came to me what it was: I had placed the gun with the muzzle pointing to the right, and it wasn't that way now. I returned to the desk, took the gun out, and gave it a look.

It was a Marley .32 all right—but not mine.

I put my eye on Koven. The gun was in my left hand, and my right hand was a fist. If I had hit him that first second, which I nearly did, mad as I was, I would have cracked some knuckles.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

My eyes were on him and through him. I kept them there for five pulse beats. It wasn't possible, I decided, that he was that good. Nobody could be.

I backed up a pace. "We've found your gun."

He gawked at me. "What?"

I broke it, saw that the cylinder was empty, and held it out. "Take a look."

He took it. "It looks the same—no, it doesn't."

"Certainly it doesn't. Mine was clean and bright. Is it yours?"

"I don't know. It looks like it. But how in the name of—"

I reached and took it from him. "How do you think? Someone with hands took mine out and put yours in. It could have been you. Was it?"

"No. Me?" Suddenly he got indignant. "How the hell could it have been me when I didn't know where mine was?"

"You said you didn't. I ought to stretch you out and tamp you down. Keeping me here the whole damn day, and now this! If you ever talk straight and to the point, now is the time. Did you touch my gun?"

"No. But you're—"

"Do you know who did?"

"No. But you're—"

"Shut up!" I went around the desk to the phone, lifted it, and dialed. At that hour Wolfe would be up in the plant rooms for his afternoon shift with the orchids, where he was not to be disturbed except in emergency, but this was one. When Fritz answered I asked him to buzz the extension, and in a moment I had Wolfe.

"Yes, Archie?" Naturally he was peevish.

"Sorry to bother you, but I'm at Koven's. I put my gun in his desk, and we were all set for his stunt, but he kept putting it off until now. His will power sticks and has to be primed with alcohol. I roamed around. We just came in here where his desk is, and I opened the drawer for a look. Someone has taken my gun and substituted his—his that was stolen, you know? It's back where it belongs, but mine is gone."

"You shouldn't have left it there."

"Okay, but I need instructions for now. Three choices: I can call a cop, or I can bring the whole bunch down there to you, or I can handle it myself. Which?"

"Confound it, not the police. They would enjoy it too much. And why bring them here? The gun's there, not here."

"Then that leaves me. I go ahead?"

"Certainly—with due discretion. It's a prank." He chuckled. "I would like to see your face. Try to get home for dinner." He hung up.

"My God, don't call a cop!" Koven protested.

"I don't intend to," I said grimly. I slipped his gun into my armpit holster. "Not if I

can help it. It depends partly on you. You stay put, right here. I'm going down and get them. Your wife's asleep in the bedroom. If I find when I get back that you've gone and started chatting with her I'll either slap you down with your own gun or phone the police, I don't know which, maybe both. Stay put."

"This is my house, Goodwin, and—"

"Damn it, don't you know a raving maniac when you see one?" I tapped my chest with a forefinger. "Me. When I'm as sore as I am now the safest thing would be for you to call a cop. I want my gun."

As I made for the door he was reaching for the bottle. By the time I got down to the ground floor I had myself well enough in hand to speak to them without betraying any special urgency, telling them that Koven was ready for them upstairs, for the conference. I found Pat Lowell still at the desk in the room in front and Hildebrand and Jordan still at their drawing tables in the workroom. I even replied appropriately when Pat Lowell asked how I had made out with the coconut. As Hildebrand and Jordan left their tables and turned off their radios I had a keener eye on them than before; someone here had

swiped my gun. As we ascended the first flight of stairs, with me in the rear, I asked their backs where I would find Adrian Getz.

Pat Lowell answered. "He may be in his room on the top floor." They halted at the landing, the edge of the big square hall, and I joined them. We could hear the radio going upstairs. She indicated the room to the left. "He takes his afternoon nap in there with Rookaloo, but not this late usually."

I thought I might as well glance in, and moved to the archway. A draft of cold air hit me, and I went on in. A window was wide open! I marched over and closed it, then went to take a look at the monkey. It was huddled on the floor in a corner of the cage, making angry little noises, with something clutched in its fingers against its chest. The light was dim, but I have good eyes, and not only was the something unmistakably a gun, but it was my Marley on a bet. Needing light, and looking for a wall switch, I was passing the large couch which faced the fireplace when suddenly I stopped and froze.

Adrian Getz, the Squirt, was lying on the couch but he wasn't taking a nap.

I bent over him for a

close-up and saw a hole in his skull northeast of his right ear, and some red juice. I stuck a hand inside the V of his vest and flattened it against him and held my breath for eight seconds. He was through taking naps.

I straightened up and called, "Come in here, all three of you, and switch on a light as you come!"

They appeared through the archway, and one of them put a hand to the wall. Lights shone. The back of the couch hid Getz from their view as they approached.

"It's cold in here," Pat Lowell was saying. "Did you open another—"

Seeing Getz stopped her, and the others, too. They goggled.

"Don't touch him," I warned them. "He's dead, so you can't help him any. Don't touch anything. You three stay here together, right here in this room, while I—"

"God Almighty," Pete Jordan blurted. Hildebrand squeaked something. Pat Lowell put out a hand, found the couch back, and gripped it. She asked something, but I wasn't listening. I was at the cage, with my back to them, peering at the monkey. It was my Marley the monkey was clutching. I had to curl my fingers until the nails sank in to keep from opening

the cage door and grabbing that gun.

I whirled. "Stick here together. Understand?" I was on my way. "I'm going up and phone."

Ignoring their noises, I left them. I mounted the stairs in no hurry, because if I had been a raving maniac before, I was now stiff with fury and I needed a few seconds to get under control. In the room upstairs Harry Koven was still seated at the desk, staring at the open drawer. He looked up and fired a question at me but got no answer. I went to the phone, lifted it, and dialed a number. When I got Wolfe he started to sputter at being disturbed again.

"I'm sorry," I told him, "but I wish to report that I have found my gun. It's in the cage with the monkey, who is—"

"What monkey?"

"Its name is Rookaloo, but please don't interrupt. It is holding my gun to its breast, I suspect because it is cold and the gun is warm, having recently been fired. Lying there on a couch is the body of a man, Adrian Getz, with a bullet hole in the head. It is no longer a question whether I call a cop, I merely wanted to report the situation to you before I do so. A thousand to one Getz was shot and killed with my gun. I will not be—hold it—"

I dropped the phone and jumped. Koven had made a dive for the door. I caught him before he reached it; got an arm and his chin, and heaved. There was a lot of feeling in it, and big as he was he sailed to a wall, bounced off, and went to the floor.

"I would love to do it again," I said, meaning it, and returned to the phone and told Wolfe, "Excuse me, Koven tried to interrupt. I was going to say I will not be home to dinner."

"The man is dead."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you anything satisfactory for the police?"

"Sure. My apologies for bringing my gun here to oblige a murderer. That's all."

"We haven't answered today's mail."

"I know. It's a damn shame. I'll get away as soon as I can."

"Very well."

The connection went. I held the button down a moment, with an eye on Koven, who was upright again but not asking for an encore, then released it and dialed the police.

I haven't kept anything like an accurate score, but I would say that over the years I haven't told the cops more than a couple of dozen barefaced lies, maybe not that many. They are seldom practical. On the other

hand, I can't recall any murder case Wolfe and I were in on and I've had my story gone into at length where I have simply opened the bag and given them all I had, with no dodging and no withholding, except one, and this is it. On the murder of Adrian Getz I didn't have a single thing on my mind that I wasn't willing and eager to shovel out, so I let them have it.

It worked fine. They called me a liar.

Not right away, of course. At first even Inspector Cramer appreciated my cooperation, knowing as he did that there wasn't a man in his army who could shade me at seeing and hearing, remembering and reporting. It was generously conceded that on finding the body I had performed properly and promptly, herding the trio into the room and keeping the Kovens from holding a family council until the law arrived. From there on, of course, everyone had been under surveillance, including me.

At six thirty, when the scientists were still monopolizing the room where Getz had got it, and city employees were wandering all over the place, and the various inmates were still in various rooms, conversing privately with Homicide men, and I had typed and signed my own frank and full

statement, I was confidently expecting that I would soon be out on the sidewalk unattended, flagging a taxi. I was in the front room on the ground floor, seated at Pat Lowell's desk, having used her typewriter, and Sergeant Purley Stebbins was sitting across from me, looking over my statement.

He lifted his head and regarded me, perfectly friendly. A perfectly friendly look from Stebbins would, from almost anyone else, cause you to get your guard up and be ready to either duck or counter, but Purley wasn't responsible for the design of his big bony face and his pig-bristle eyebrows.

"I guess you got it all in," he admitted. "As you told it."

"I suggest," I said modestly, "that when this case is put away you send that to the school to be used as a model report."

"Yeah." He stood up. "You're a good typist." He turned to go.

I arose, too, saying casually, "I can run along now?"

The door opened and Inspector Cramer entered. I didn't like his expression as he darted a glance at me. Knowing him well in all his moods, I didn't like the way his broad shoulders were hunched, or his clamped jaw, or the glint in his eye.

"Here's Goodwin's state-

ment," Purley said. "Okay?"

"Send him downtown and hold him."

It caught me completely off balance. "Hold *me*?" I demanded, squeaking almost like Hildebrand.

"Yes, sir." Nothing could catch Purley off balance. "On your order?"

"No, charge him. Sullivan Act. He has no license for the gun we found on him."

"Ha, ha," I said. "Ha, ha, and ha, ha. There, you got your laugh. A very fine gag. Ha."

"You're going down, Goodwin. I'll be down to see you later."

As I said, I knew him well. He meant it. I had his eyes. "This," I said, "is way out of my reach. I've told you where and how and why I got that gun." I pointed to the paper in Purley's hand. "Read it. It's all down, punctuated."

"You had the gun in your holster and you have no license for it."

"Nuts. But I get it. You've been hoping for years to hang something on Nero Wolfe, and to you I'm just a part of him, and you think here's your chance. Of course it won't stick. Wouldn't you rather have something that will? Like resisting arrest and assaulting an officer? Glad to oblige. Watch it—"

Tipping forward, I started a left hook for his jaw, fast and vicious, then jerked it down and went back on my heels. It didn't create a panic, but I had the satisfaction of seeing Cramer take a quick step back and Stebbins one forward. They bumped.

"There," I said. "With both of you to swear to it, that ought to be good for at least two years. I'll throw the typewriter at you if you'll promise to catch it."

"Cut the clowning," Purley growled.

"You lied about that gun," Cramer snapped. "If you don't want to get taken down to think it over, think now. Tell me what you came here for and what happened."

"I've told you."

"A string of lies."

"No, sir."

"You can have 'em back. I'm not trying to hang something on Wolfe, or you either. I want to know why you came here and what happened."

"Oh, for God's sake," I moved my eyes. "Okay, Purley, where's my escort?"

Cramer strode four paces to the door, opened it, and called, "Bring Mr. Koven in here!"

Harry Koven entered with a dick at his elbow. He looked as if he was even farther away from happiness than before.

"We'll sit down," Cramer said.

He left me behind the desk. Purley and the dick took chairs in the background. Cramer stationed himself across the desk from me, where Purley had been, with Koven on a chair at his left. He opened up.

"I told you, Mr. Koven, that I would ask you to repeat your story in Goodwin's presence, and you said you would."

Koven nodded. "That's right." He was hoarse.

"We won't need all the details. Just answer me briefly. When you called on Nero Wolfe last Saturday evening, what did you ask him to do?"

"I told him I was going to have Dazzle Dan start a detective agency in a new series. I told him I needed technical assistance, and possibly a tie-up, if we could arrange—"

There was a pad of ruled paper on the desk. I reached for it, and a pencil, and started doing shorthand. Cramer leaned over, stretched an arm, grabbed a corner of the pad, and jerked it away.

"We need your full attention," Cramer growled. He went to Koven. "Did you say anything to Wolfe about your gun being taken from your desk?"

"Certainly not. It hadn't been taken. I did mention that I

had a gun in my desk for which I had no license, but that I never carried it, and I asked if that was risky. I told them what make it was, a Marley thirty-two. I asked how much trouble it would be to get a license, and if—"

"Keep it brief. Just cover the points. What arrangement did you make with Wolfe?"

"He agreed to send Goodwin to my place on Monday for a conference with my staff and me."

"About what?"

"About the technical problems of having Dazzle Dan do detective work, and possibly a tie-up."

"And Goodwin came?"

"Yes, today around noon." Koven's hoarseness kept interfering with him, and he kept clearing his throat. My eyes were at his face, but he hadn't met them. Of course he was talking to Cramer and had to be polite. He went on, "The conference was for twelve thirty, but I had a little talk with Goodwin and asked him to wait. I have to be careful what I do with Dan and I wanted to think it over some more. Anyway I'm like that, I put things off. It was after four o'clock when he—"

"Was your talk with Goodwin about your gun being gone?"

"Certainly not. We might have mentioned the gun, about my not having a license for it, I don't remember—no, wait a minute, we must have, because I pulled the drawer open and we glanced in at it. Except for that, we only talked—"

"Did you or Goodwin take your gun out of the drawer?"

"No. Absolutely not."

"Did he put his gun in the drawer?"

"Absolutely not."

I slid in, "When I took my gun from my holster to show it to you, did you—"

"Nothing doing," Cramer snapped at me. "You're listening. Just the high spots for now." He returned to Koven. "Did you have another talk with Goodwin later?"

Koven nodded. "Yes, around half-past three he came up to my room—the living room. We talked until after four, there and in my office, and then—"

"In your office did Goodwin open the drawer of the desk and take the gun out and say it had been changed?"

"Certainly not!"

"What did he do?"

"Nothing, only we talked, and then he left to go down and get the others to come up for the conference. After a while he came back alone, and without saying anything he came to the desk and took my gun from the

drawer and put it under his coat. Then he went to the phone and called Nero Wolfe. When I heard him tell Wolfe that Adrian Getz had been shot, that he was on a couch downstairs dead, I got up to go down there, and Goodwin jumped me from behind and knocked me out. When I came to he was still talking to Wolfe, I don't know what he was telling him, and then he called the police. He wouldn't let me—"

"Hold it," Cramer said curtly. "That covers that. One more point. Do you know of any motive for Goodwin's wanting to murder Adrian Getz?"

"No, I don't. I told—"

"Then if Getz was shot with Goodwin's gun how would you account for it? You're not obliged to account for it, but if you don't mind just repeat what you told me."

"Well—" Koven hesitated. He cleared his throat for the twentieth time. "I told you about the monkey. Goodwin opened a window, and that's enough to kill that kind of monkey, and Getz was very fond of it. He didn't show how upset he was but Getz was very quiet and didn't show things much. I understand Goodwin likes to kid people. Of course I don't know what happened, but

if Goodwin went in there later when Getz was there, and started to open a window, you can't tell. When Getz once got aroused he was apt to do anything. He couldn't have hurt Goodwin any, but Goodwin might have got out his gun just for a gag, and Getz tried to take it away, and it went off accidentally. That wouldn't be murder, would it?"

"No," Cramer said, "that would only be a regrettable accident. That's all for now, Mr. Koven. Take him out, Sol, and bring Hildebrand."

As Koven arose and the dick came forward I reached for the phone on Pat Lowell's desk. My hand got there, but so did Cramer's, hard on top of mine.

"The lines here are busy," he stated. "There'll be a phone you can use downtown. Do you want to hear Hildebrand before you comment?"

"I'm crazy to hear Hildebrand," I assured him. "No doubt he'll explain that I tossed the gun in the monkey's cage to frame the monkey. Let's just wait for Hildebrand."

It wasn't much of a wait; the Homicide boys are snappy. Byram Hildebrand, ushered in by Sol, gave me a long straight look before he took the chair Koven had vacated. He still had good presence, with his fine mat of nearly white hair, but

his extremities were nervous. When he sat he couldn't find comfortable spots for either his hands or his feet.

"This will only take a minute," Cramer told him. "I just want to check on Sunday morning. Yesterday. You were here working?"

Hildebrand nodded, and the squeak came. "I was putting on some touches. I often work Sundays."

"You were in there in the workroom?"

"Yes. Mr. Getz was there, making some suggestions. I was doubtful about one of his suggestions and went upstairs to consult Mr. Koven, but Mrs. Koven was in the hall and—"

"You mean the big hall one flight up?"

"Yes. She said Mr. Koven wasn't up yet and Miss Lowell was in his office waiting to see him. Miss Lowell has extremely good judgment, and I went up to consult her. She disapproved of Mr. Getz's suggestion, and we discussed various matters, and mention was made of the gun Mr. Koven kept in his desk drawer. I pulled the drawer open just to look at it, with no special purpose, merely to look at it, and closed the drawer again. Shortly afterward I returned downstairs."

"Was the gun there in the drawer?"

"Yes."

"Did you take it out?"

"No. Neither did Miss Lowell. We didn't touch it."

"But you recognized it as the same gun?"

"I can't say that I did, no. I had never examined the gun, never had it in my hand. I can only say that it looked the same as before. It was my opinion that our concern about the gun being kept there was quite childish, but I see now that I was wrong. After what happened today—"

"Yeah." Cramer cut him off. "Concern about a loaded gun is never childish. That's all I'm after now. Okay, that's all." Cramer nodded at Sol. "Take him back to Rowcliff."

I treated myself to a good deep breath. Purley was squinting at me, not gloating, just concentrating. Cramer turned his head to see that the door was closed after the dick and the artist, then turned back to me.

"Your turn," he growled.

I shook my head. "Lost my voice," I whispered.

"You're not funny, Goodwin. You're never as funny as you think you are. This time you're not funny at all. You can have five minutes to go over it and realize how complicated it is. When you phoned Wolfe before you phoned us, you

couldn't possibly have arranged all the details. I've got you. I'll be leaving here before long to join you downtown and on my way I'll stop in at Wolfe's for a talk. He won't clam up in this one. At the very least I've got you good on the Sullivan Act. Want five minutes?"

"No, sir." I was calm but emphatic. "I want five days and I would advise you to take a full week. Complicated doesn't begin to describe it. Before I leave for downtown, if you're actually going to crawl out on that one, I wish to remind you of something, and don't forget it. When I voluntarily took Koven's gun from my holster and turned it over—it wasn't 'found on me,' as you put it—I also turned over six nice clean cartridges which I had in my vest pocket, having previously removed them from my gun. I hope none of your heroes gets careless and mixes them up with the cartridges found in my gun, if any, when you retrieved it from the monkey. That would be a mistake. The point is, if I removed the cartridges from my gun in order to insert one or more from Koven's gun, when and why did I do it? There's a day's work for you right there. And if I did do it, then Koven's friendly effort to fix me up for justifiable manslaughter is wasted, much

as I appreciate it, because I must have been premeditating something, and you know what. Why fiddle around with the Sullivan Act? Make it the big one. Now I button up."

Cramer eyed me. "Even a suspended sentence," he said, "you lose your license."

I grinned at him.

"Send him down," Cramer rasped.

Even when a man is caught smack in the middle of a felony, as I had been, there is a certain amount of red tape to getting him behind bars, and in my case not only red tape but also other activities postponed my attainment of privacy. First, I had a long conversation with an Assistant District Attorney, who was the suave and subtle type and even ate sandwiches with me. When it was over, a little after nine o'clock, both of us were only slightly more confused than when we started. He left me in a room with a specimen in uniform with slick brown hair and a wart on his cheek. I told him how to get rid of the wart, recommending Doc Vollmer.

I was expecting the promised visit by Inspector Cramer any minute. Naturally I was nursing an assorted collection of resentments, but the one on top was at not being there to see and

hear the talk between Cramer and Wolfe. Any chat those two had was always worth listening to, and that one must have been outstanding, with Wolfe learning not only that his client was lying five ways from Sunday, which was bad enough, but also that I had been tossed in the can and the day's mail would have to go unanswered.

When the door finally opened and a visitor entered it wasn't Inspector Cramer. It was Lieutenant Rowcliff, whose murder I will not have to premeditate when I get around to it because I have already done the premeditating. There are not many murderer's so vicious and inhuman that I would enjoy seeing them caught by Rowcliff. He jerked a chair around to sit facing me and said with oily satisfaction, "At last we've got you."

That set the tone of the interview.

I would enjoy recording in full that two-hour session with Rowcliff, but it would sound like bragging, and therefore I don't suppose you would enjoy it, too. His biggest handicap is that when he gets irritated to a certain point he can't help stuttering, and I'm onto him enough to tell when he's just about there, and then I start stuttering before he does. Even with a close watch and careful

timing it takes luck to do it right, and that evening I was lucky. He came closer than ever before to plugging me, but didn't, because he wants to be a captain so bad he can taste it and he's not absolutely sure that Wolfe hasn't got a solid in with the Commissioner or even the Mayor.

Cramer never showed up, and that added another resentment to my healthy pile. I knew he had been to see Wolfe, because when they had finally let me make my phone call, around eight o'clock, and I had got Wolfe and started to tell him about it, he interrupted me in a voice as cold as an Eskimo's nose.

"I know where you are and how you got there. Mr. Cramer is here. I have phoned Mr. Parker, but it's too late to do anything tonight. Have you had anything to eat?"

"No, sir. I'm afraid of poison and I'm on a hunger strike."

"You should eat something. Mr. Cramer is worse than a jackass; he's demented. I intend to persuade him, if possible, of the desirability of releasing you at once."

He hung up.

When, shortly after eleven, Rowcliff called it off and I was shown to my room, there had been no sign of Cramer. The room was in no way remark-

able, merely what was to be expected in a structure of that type; but it was fairly clean, strongly scented with disinfectant, and was in a favorable location since the nearest corridor light was six paces away and therefore did not glare through the bars of my door. Also it was a single, which I appreciated. Alone at last, away from telephones and other interruptions, I undressed and arranged my gray pinstripe on the chair, draped my shirt over the end of the blankets, got in, stretched, and settled down for a complete survey of the complications. But my brain and nerves had other plans, and in twenty seconds I was asleep.

In the morning there was a certain amount of activity, with the check-off and a trip to the lavatory and breakfast, but after that I had more privacy than I really cared for. By noon I would almost have welcomed a visit from Rowcliff and was beginning to suspect that someone had lost a paper and there was no record of me anywhere and everyone was too busy to stop and think. Lunch, which I will not describe, broke the monotony some, but then, back in my room, I decided to spread all the pieces out, sort them, and have a look at the picture as it had been drawn to

date; but it got so damn jumbled that I couldn't make first base, let alone on around.

At 1:09 my door swung open and the floorwalker, a chunky short guy with only half an ear on the right side, told me to come along. I went willingly, on out of the block to an elevator, and along a ground-floor corridor to an office. There I was pleased to see the tall lanky figure and long pale face of Henry George Parker, the only lawyer Wolfe would admit to the bar if he had the say. He came to shake my hand and said he'd have me out of there in a minute now.

"No rush," I said stiffly. "Don't let it interfere with anything important."

He laughed, haw-haw, and took me inside the gate. All the formalities but one which required my presence had already been attended to, and he made good on his minute. On the way up in the taxi he explained why I had been left to rot until past noon. Getting bail on the Sullivan Act charge had been simple, but I had also been tagged with a material witness warrant, and the D.A. had asked the judge to put it at fifty grand! He had been stubborn about it, and the best Parker could do was talk it down to twenty, and he had had to report back to Wolfe

before closing the deal. I was not to leave the jurisdiction. As the taxi crossed Thirty-fourth Street I looked west across the river. I had never cared much for New Jersey, but now the idea of driving through the tunnel and on among the billboards seemed attractive.

I preceded Parker up the stoop at the old brownstone on West Thirty-fifth, used my key but found that the chain bolt was on, which was normal but not invariable when I was out of the house, and had to push the button. Fritz Brenner, chef and house manager, let us in and stood while we disposed of our coats and hats.

"Are you all right, Archie?" he inquired.

"No," I said frankly. "Don't you smell me?"

As we went down the hall Wolfe appeared, coming from the door to the dining room. He stopped and regarded me. I returned his gaze with my chin up.

"I'll go up and rinse off," I said, "while you're finishing lunch."

"I've finished," he said grimly. "Have you eaten?"

"Enough to hold me."

"Then we'll get started."

He marched into the office, across the hall from the dining room, went to his oversized chair behind his desk, sat, and

got himself adjusted for comfort. Parker took the red leather chair. As I crossed to my desk I started talking, to get the jump on him.

"It will help," I said, not aggressively but pointedly, "if we first get it settled about my leaving that room with my gun there in the drawer. I do not—"

"Shut up!" Wolfe snapped.

"In that case," I demanded, "why didn't you leave me in the coop? I'll go back and—"

"Sit down!"

I sat.

"I deny," he said, "that you were in the slightest degree imprudent. Even if you were, this has transcended such petty considerations." He picked up a sheet of paper from his desk. "This is a letter which came yesterday from a Mrs. E. R. Baumgarten. She wants me to investigate the activities of a nephew who is employed by the business she owns. I wish to reply. Your notebook."

He was using what I call his conclusive tone, leaving no room for questions, let alone argument. I got my notebook and pen.

"Dear Mrs. Baumgarten." He went at it as if he had already composed it in his mind. "Thank you very much for your letter of the thirteenth, requesting me to undertake an investigation for you. Para-

graph. I am sorry that I cannot be of service to you. I am compelled to decline because I have been informed by an official of the New York Police Department that my license to operate a private detective agency is about to be taken away from me. Sincerely yours."

Parker ejaculated something and got ignored. I stayed deadpan, but among my emotions was renewed regret that I had missed Wolfe's and Cramer's talk.

Wolfe was saying, "Type it at once and send Fritz to mail it. If any requests for appointments come by telephone refuse them, giving the reason and keeping a record."

"The reason given in the letter?"

"Yes."

I swiveled the typewriter to me, got paper and carbon in, and hit the keys. I had to concentrate. Parker was asking questions, and Wolfe was grunting at him. I finished the letter and envelope, had Wolfe sign it, went to the kitchen and told Fritz to take it to Eighth Avenue immediately, and returned to the office.

"Now," Wolfe said, "I want all of it. Go ahead."

Ordinarily when I start giving Wolfe a full report of an event, no matter how extended

and involved, I just glide in and keep going with no effort at all, thanks to my long and hard training. That time, having just got a severe jolt, I wasn't so hot at the beginning, since I was supposed to include every word and movement, but by the time I had got to where I opened the window it was coming smooth and easy. As usual, Wolfe soaked it all in without making any interruptions.

It took all of an hour and a half, and then came questions, but not many. I rate a report by the number of questions he has when I'm through, and by that test this was up toward the top. Wolfe leaned back and closed his eyes.

Parker spoke. "It could have been any of them, but it must have been Koven. Or why his string of lies, knowing that you and Goodwin would both contradict him?" The lawyer haw-hawed. "That is, if they're lies—considering your settled policy of telling your counselor only what you think he should know."

"Pfui." Wolfe's eyes came open. "This is extraordinarily intricate, Archie. Have you examined it any?"

"I've started. When I pick at it, it gets worse instead of better."

"Yes. I'm afraid you'll have to type it out. By eleven

tomorrow morning?"

"I guess so, but I need a bath first. Anyway, what for? What can we do with it without a license? I suppose it's suspended?"

He ignored it. "What the devil is that smell?" he demanded.

"Disinfectant. It's for the bloodhounds in case you escape." I arose. "I'll go scrub."

"No." He glanced at the wall clock, which said 3:45—fifteen minutes to go until he was due to join Theodore and the orchids up on the roof. "An errand first. I believe it's the *Gazette* that carries the Dazzle Dan comic strip?"

"Yes, sir."

"Daily and Sunday?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want all of them for the past three years. Can you get them?"

"Now?"

"Yes. Wait a minute—confound it, don't be a cyclone! You should hear my instructions for Mr. Parker, but first one for you. Mail Mr. Koven a bill for recovery of his gun—five hundred dollars. It should go today."

"Any extras, under the circumstances?"

"No. Five hundred flat." Wolfe turned to the lawyer. "Mr. Parker, how long will it take to enter a suit for damages

and serve a summons on the defendant?"

"That depends." Parker sounded like a lawyer. "If it's rushed all possible and there are no unforeseen obstacles and the defendant is accessible for service, it could be merely a matter of hours."

"By noon tomorrow?"

"Quite possibly, yes."

"Then proceed, please. Mr Koven has destroyed, by slander, my means of livelihood. I wish to bring an action demanding payment by him of the sum of one million dollars."

"M-m-m-m," Parker said. He was frowning.

I addressed Wolfe. "I want to apologize," I told him, "for jumping to a conclusion. I was supposing you had lost control for once and buried it too deep in Cramer. Whereas you did it purposely, getting set for this. I'll be damned."

Wolfe grunted.

"In this sort of thing," Parker said, "it is usual, and desirable, to first send a written request for recompense, by your attorney if you prefer. It looks better."

"I don't care how it looks. I want immediate action."

"Then we'll act." That was one of the reasons Wolfe stuck to Parker; he was no dilly-dalier. "But I must ask, isn't the sum a little flamboyant?"

"It is not flamboyant. At a hundred thousand a year, a modest expectation, my income would be a million in ten years. A detective license once lost in this fashion is not easily regained."

"All right. A million. I'll need all the facts for drafting a complaint."

"You have them. You've just heard Archie recount them. Must you stickle for more?"

"No. I'll manage." Parker got to his feet. "One thing, though, service of process may be a problem. Policemen may still be around, and even if they aren't I doubt if strangers will be getting into that house tomorrow."

"Archie will send Saul Panzer to you. Saul can get in anywhere and do anything." Wolfe wiggled a finger. "I want Mr. Koven to get that. I want to see him in this room. Five times this morning I tried to get him on the phone, without success. If that doesn't get him I'll devise something that will."

"He'll give it to his attorney."

"Then the attorney will come, and if he's not an imbecile I'll give myself thirty minutes to make him send for his client or go and get him. Well?"

Parker turned and left. I got at the typewriter to make out a

bill for half a grand, which seemed like a waste of paper after what I had just heard.

At midnight that Tuesday the office was a sight. It has often been a mess, one way and another, including the time the strangled Cynthia Brown was lying on the floor with her tongue protruding, but this was something new. Dazzle Dan, both black-and-white and color, was all over the place. On account of our shortage in manpower, with me tied up on my typing job, Fritz and Theodore had been drafted for the chore of tearing out the pages and stacking them chronologically, ready for Wolfe to study. With Wolfe's permission, I had bribed Lon Cohen of the *Gazette* to have three years of Dazzle Dan assembled and delivered to us, by offering him an exclusive. Naturally he demanded specifications.

"Nothing much," I told him on the phone. "Only that Nero Wolfe is out of the detective business because Inspector Cramer is taking his license."

"Quite a gag," Lon conceded.

"No gag. Straight."

"You mean it?"

"We're offering it for publication. Exclusive, unless Cramer's office spills it, and I don't think they will."

"The Getz murder?"

"Yes. Only a couple of paragraphs, because details are not yet available, even to you. I'm out on bail."

"I know you are. This is pie. We'll raid the files and get it over there as soon as we can."

He hung up without pressing for details. Of course that meant he would send Dazzle Dan C.O.D., with a reporter. When the reporter arrived a couple of hours later, shortly after Wolfe had come down from the plant rooms at six o'clock, it wasn't just a man with a notebook, it was Lon Cohen himself. He came to the office with me, dumped a big heavy carton on the floor by my desk, removed his coat and dropped it on the carton to show that Dazzle Dan was his property until paid for, and demanded, "I want the works. What Wolfe said and what Cramer said. A picture of Wolfe studying Dazzle Dan—"

I pushed him into a chair, courteously, and gave him all we were ready to turn loose. Naturally that wasn't enough; it never is. I let him fire questions up to a dozen or so, even answering one or two, and then made it clear that was all for now and I had work to do. He admitted it was a bargain, stuck his notebook in his pocket, and got up and picked up his coat.

"If you're not in a hurry, Mr. Cohen," muttered Wolfe, who had left the interview to me.

Lon dropped the coat and sat down. "I have nineteen years, Mr. Wolfe. Before I retire."

"I won't detain you that long," Wolfe sighed. "I am no longer a detective, but I'm a primate and therefore curious. The function of a newspaperman is to satisfy curiosity. Who killed Mr. Getz?"

Lon's brows went up. "Archie Goodwin? It was his gun."

"Nonsense. I'm quite serious. Also I'm discreet. I am excluded from the customary sources of information by the jackassery of Mr. Cramer. I—"

"May I print that?"

"No. None of this. Nor shall I quote you. This is a private conversation. I would like to know what your colleagues are saying but not printing. Who killed Mr. Getz? Miss Lowell? If so, why?"

Lon pulled his lower lip down and let it up again. "You mean we're just talking."

"Yes."

"This might possibly lead to another talk that could be printed."

"It might. I make no commitment." Wolfe wasn't eager.

"You wouldn't. As for Miss Lowell, she has not been scratched. It is said that Getz learned she was chiseling on royalties from makers of Dazzle Dan products and intended to hang it on her. That could have been big money."

"Any names or dates?"

"None that are repeatable. By me. Yet."

"Any evidence?"

"I haven't seen any."

Wolfe grunted. "Mr. Hildebrand. If so, why?"

"That's shorter and sadder. He has told friends about it. He has been with Koven for eight years and was told last week he could leave at the end of the month, and he blamed it on Getz. He might or might not get another job at his age."

Wolfe nodded. "Mr. Jordan?"

Lon hesitated. "This I don't like, but others are talking, so why not us? They say Jordan has painted some pictures, modern stuff, and twice he has tried to get a gallery to show them, two different galleries, and both times Getz has somehow kiboshed it. This has names and dates, but whether because Getz was born a louse or whether he wanted to keep Jordan—"

"I'll do my own speculating. Mr. Getz may not have liked the pictures. Mr. Koven?"

Lon turned a hand over. "Well? What better could you ask? Getz had him buffaloed, no doubt about it. Getz ruled the roost, plenty of evidence on that, and nobody knows why, so the only question is what he had on Koven. It must have been good, but what was it? You say this is a private conversation?"

"Yes."

"Then here's something we got started on just this afternoon. It has to be checked before we print it. That house on Seventy-sixth Street is in Getz's name."

"Indeed." Wolfe shut his eyes and opened them again. "And Mrs. Koven?"

Lon turned his other hand over. "Husband and wife are one, aren't they?"

"Yes. Man and wife make one fool."

Lon's chin jerked up. "I want to print that. Why not?"

"It was printed more than three hundred years ago. Ben Jonson wrote it." Wolfe sighed. "Confound it, what can I do with only a few scraps?" He pointed at the carton. "You want that stuff back, I suppose?"

— Lon said he did. He also said he would be glad to go on with the private conversation in the interest of justice and the public welfare, but apparently

Wolfe had all the scraps he could use at the moment. After ushering Lon to the door I went up to my room to spend an hour attending to purely personal matters, a detail that had been too long postponed. I was out of the shower, selecting a shirt, when a call came from Saul Panzer in response to the message I had left. I gave him all the features of the picture that would help and told him to report to Parker's law office in the morning.

After dinner that evening we were all hard at it in the office. Fritz and Theodore were unfolding *Gazettes*, finding the right page and tearing it out. I was banging away at my machine, three pages an hour. Wolfe was at his desk, concentrating on a methodical and exhaustive study of three years of Dazzle Dan. It was well after midnight when he pushed back his chair, arose, stretched, rubbed his eyes, and told us, "It's bedtime. This morass of fatuity has given me indigestion. Good night."

Wednesday morning he tried to put one over. His routine was breakfast in his room, with the morning paper, at eight; then shaving and dressing; then, from nine to eleven, his morning shift up in the plant rooms. He never went to the office before eleven, and the detective

business was never allowed to mingle with the orchids. But that Wednesday he fudged. While I was in the kitchen with Fritz, enjoying griddle cakes, Darst's sausage, honey, and plenty of coffee, and going through the morning papers, with two readings of the *Gazette's* account of Wolfe's enforced retirement, Wolfe sneaked downstairs into the office and made off with a stack of Dazzle Dan.

The way I knew, before breakfast I had gone in there to straighten up a little, and I am trained to observe. Returning after breakfast, and glancing around before starting at my typewriter, I saw that half of a pile of Dan was gone. I don't think I had ever seen him quite so hot under the collar. I admit I fully approved. Not only did I not make an excuse for a trip up to the roof to catch him at it, but I even took the trouble to be out of the office when he came down at eleven o'clock, to give him a chance to get Dan back unseen.

My first job after breakfast had been to carry out some instructions Wolfe had given me the evening before. Manhattan office hours being what they are, I got no answer at the number of Levay Recorders, Inc., until 9:35. Then it took some talking to get a promise of

immediate action, and if it hadn't been for the name of Nero Wolfe I wouldn't have made it. But I got both the promise and the action. A little after ten, two men arrived with cartons of equipment and tool kits, and in less than an hour they were through and gone, and it was a neat and nifty job. It would have taken an expert search to reveal anything suspicious in the office, and the wire to the kitchen, running around the baseboard and on through, wouldn't be suspicious even if seen.

It was hard going at the typewriter on account of the phone ringing, chiefly reporters wanting to talk to Wolfe, and finally I had to ask Fritz in to answer the damn thing and give everybody a brushoff. A call he switched to me was one from the D.A.'s office. They had the nerve to ask me to come down there so they could ask me something. I told them I was busy answering Help Wanted ads and couldn't spare the time.

Half an hour later Fritz switched another one to me. It was Sergeant Purley Stebbins. He was good and sore, beefing about Wolfe having no authority to break the news about losing his license, and it wasn't official yet, and where did I think it would get me refusing to cooperate with the D.A. on a

murder when I had discovered the body, and I could have my choice of coming down quick or having a P.D. car come and get me. I let him use up his breath.

"Listen, brother," I told him, "I hadn't heard that the name of this city has been changed to Moscow. If Mr. Wolfe wants to publish it that he's out of business, hoping that someone will pass the hat or offer him a job as doorman, that's his affair. As for my cooperating, nuts. You have already got me sewed up on two charges, and on advice of counsel and my doctor I am staying home, taking aspirin and gargling with prune juice and gin. If you come here, you won't get in without a search warrant. If you come with another warrant for me, say for cruelty to animals because I opened the window, you can either wait on the stoop until I emerge or shoot the door down, whichever you prefer. I am now hanging up."

"If you'll listen a minute—"

"Goodbye, you double-breasted nitwit."

I cradled the phone, sat thirty seconds to calm down, and resumed at the typewriter. The next interruption came not from the outside but from Wolfe, a little before noon. He was back at his desk, analyzing

Dazzle Dan. Suddenly he pronounced my name, and I swiveled.

"Yes, sir."

"Look at this."

He slid a sheet of the *Gazette* across his desk, and I got up and took it. It was a Sunday half page, in color, from four months back. In the first frame Dazzle Dan was scooting along a country road on a motorcycle, passing a roadside sign that read:

PEACHES RIGHT FROM THE TREE!
AGGIE GHOL AND HAGGIE KROOL

In frame two D.D. had stopped his bike alongside a peach tree full of red and yellow fruit. Standing there were two females, presumably Aggie Ghool and Haggie Krool. One was old and bent, dressed in burlap as near as I could tell; the other was young and pink-cheeked, wearing a mink coat. If you say surely not a mink coat, I say I'm telling what I saw. D.D. was saying, in his balloon, "Gimme a dozen."

Frame three: the young female was handing D.D. the peaches, and the old one was extending her hand for payment. Frame four: the old one was giving D.D. his change from a bill. Frame five: the old one was handing the young one a coin and saying, "Here's your ten per cent, Haggie," and the

young one was saying, "Thank you very much, Aggie." Frame six: D.D. was asking Aggie, "Why don't you split it even?" and Aggie was telling him, "Because it's my tree." Frame seven: D.D. was off again on the bike, but I felt I had had enough and looked at Wolfe inquiringly.

"Am I supposed to comment?"

"If it would help, yes."

"I pass. If it's a feed from the National Industrialists' League it's the wrong angle. If you mean the mink coat, Pat Lowell's may not be paid for."

He grunted. "There have been two similar episodes, one each year, with the same characters."

"Then it may be paid for."

"Is that all?"

"It's all for now. I'm not a brain, I'm a typist. I've got to finish this damn report."

I tossed the art back to him and returned to work.

At 12:28 I handed him the finished report, and he dropped D.D. and started on it. I went to the kitchen to tell Fritz I would take on the phone again, and as I re-entered the office it was ringing. I crossed to my desk and got it. My daytime formula was, "Nero Wolfe's office, Archie Goodwin speaking," but with our license gone it was presumably illegal to

have an office, so I said, "Nero Wolfe's residence, Archie Goodwin speaking," and heard Saul Panzer's husky voice.

"Reporting in, Archie. No trouble at all. Koven is served. Put it in his hand five minutes ago."

"In the house?"

"Yes. I'll call Parker—"

"How did you get in?"

"Oh, simple. The man that delivers stuff from the Furnari's you told me about has got the itch bad, and it only took ten bucks. Of course after I got inside I had to use my head and legs both, but with your sketch of the layout it was a cinch."

"For you, yes. Mr. Wolfe says satisfactory, which as you know is as far as he ever goes. I say you show promise. You'll call Parker?"

"Yes. I have to go there to sign a paper."

"Okay. Be seeing you."

I hung up and told Wolfe. He lifted his eyes, said, "Ah!" and returned to my report.

After lunch there was an important chore, involving Wolfe, me, our memory of the talk Saturday evening with Koven, and the equipment that had been installed by Levay Recorders, Inc. We spent nearly an hour at it, with three separate tries, before we got it done to Wolfe's satisfaction.

After that it dragged along.

The phone calls had fallen off. Wolfe, at his desk, finished with the report, put it in a drawer, leaned back, and closed his eyes. I would just as soon have opened a conversation, but pretty soon his lips started working—pushing out, drawing back and pushing out again—and I knew his brain was busy, so I went to the cabinet for a batch of the germination records and settled down to making entries. He didn't need a license to grow orchids, though the question would soon arise of how to pay the bills.

At four o'clock he left to go up to the plant rooms, and I went on with the records. During the next two hours there were a few phone calls, but none from Koven or his lawyer or Parker. At two minutes past six I was telling myself that Koven was probably drinking himself up to something when two things happened at once: the sound came from the hall of Wolfe's elevator jerking to a stop, and the doorbell rang.

I went to the hall, switched on the stoop light, and took a look through the panel of one-way glass in the front door. It was a mink coat all right, but the hat was different. I marched to the office door and announced, "Miss Patricia Low-

ell. Will she do?"

He made a face. He seldom welcomes a man crossing his threshold; he never welcomes a woman. "Let her in," he muttered.

I stepped to the front, slid the bolt off, and opened up. "This is the kind of surprise I like," I said heartily. She entered, and I shut the door and bolted it. "Couldn't you find a coconut?"

"I want to see Nero Wolfe," she said in a voice so hard that it was out of character, considering her pink cheeks.

"Sure. This way." I ushered her down the hall and on in. Once in a while Wolfe rises when a woman enters his office, but this time he kept not only his chair but also his tongue. He inclined his head a quarter of an inch when I pronounced her name, but said nothing. I gave her the red leather chair, helped her throw her coat back, and went to my desk.

"So you're Nero Wolfe."

That called for no comment and got none.

"I'm scared to death," she said.

"You don't look it," Wolfe growled.

"I hope I don't; I'm trying not to." She started to put her bag on the little table—at her elbow, changed her mind, and kept it in her lap. She took off

a glove. "I was sent here by Mr. Koven."

No comment. We were looking at her. She looked at me, then back at Wolfe, and protested, "My God, don't you ever say anything?"

"Only on occasion." Wolfe leaned back. "Give me one."

She compressed her lips. "Mr. Koven sent me," she said, "about the ridiculous suit for damages you have brought. He intends to enter a counterclaim for damage to his reputation through actions of your acknowledged agent, Archie Goodwin. Of course he denies that there is any basis for your suit."

She stopped. Wolfe met her gaze and kept his trap shut.

"That's the situation," she said belligerently.

"Thank you for coming to tell me," Wolfe murmured. "If you'll show Miss Lowell the way out, please, Archie?"

I stood up. She looked at me as if I had offered her a deadly insult, and looked back at Wolfe. "I don't think," she said, "that your attitude is very sensible. I think you and Mr. Koven should come to an agreement on this. Why wouldn't this be the way to do it—say the claims cancel each other, and you abandon yours and he abandons his?"

"Because," Wolfe said dryly, "my claim is valid and his isn't.

If you're a member of the bar, Miss Lowell, you should know that this is a little improper, or anyway unconventional. You should be talking with my attorney, not with me."

"I'm not a lawyer, Mr. Wolfe. I'm Mr. Koven's agent and business manager. He thinks lawyers would just make this more of a mess than it is, and I agree with him. He thinks you and he should settle it between you. Isn't that possible?"

"I don't know. We can try. There's a phone. Get him down here."

She shook her head. "He's too upset. I'm sure you'll find it more practical to deal with me, and if we come to an understanding he'll approve, I guarantee that. Why don't we go into it—the two claims?"

"I doubt if it will get us anywhere. For one thing, a factor in both claims is the question who killed Adrian Getz, and why? If it was Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Koven's claim has a footing, and I freely concede it; if it was someone else I concede nothing. If I discussed it with you I would have to begin by considering that aspect; I would have to ask you some pointed questions; and I doubt if you would dare to risk answering them."

"I can always button up.

What kind of questions?"

"Well—" Wolfe pursed his lips. "For example, how's the monkey?"

"I can risk answering that. It's sick. It's at the Speyer Hospital. They don't expect it to live."

"Exposure from the open window?"

"Yes. They're very delicate, that kind."

Wolfe nodded. "That table over there by the globe—that pile of stuff on it is Dazzle Dan for the past three years. I've been looking through it. Last August and September a monkey had a prominent role. It was drawn by two different persons, or at least with two different conceptions. In its first seventeen appearances it was depicted maliciously—on a conjecture, by someone with a distaste for monkeys. Thereafter it was drawn sympathetically and humorously. The change was abrupt and noticeable. Why? On instructions from Mr. Koven?"

Pat Lowell was frowning. Her lips parted and went together again.

"You have four choices," Wolfe said bluntly. "The truth, a lie, evasion, or refusal to answer. Either of the last two would make me curious, and I would get my curiosity satisfied somehow. If you try a lie it

may work, but I'm an expert on lies and liars."

"There's nothing to lie about. I was thinking back. Mr. Getz objected to the way the monkey was drawn, and Mr. Koven had Mr. Jordan do it instead of Mr. Hildebrand."

"Mr. Jordan likes monkeys?"

"He likes animals. He said the monkey looked like Napoleon."

"Mr. Hildebrand does not like monkeys?"

"He didn't like that one. Rookaloo knew it, of course, and bit him once. Isn't this pretty silly, Mr. Wolfe? Are you going on with this?"

"Unless you walk out, yes. I'm investigating Mr. Koven's counterclaim, and this is how I do it. With any question you have your four choices—and a fifth, too, of course; get up and go. How did you feel about the monkey?"

"I thought it was an awful nuisance, but it had its points as a diversion. It was my fault it was there, since I gave it to Mr. Getz."

"Indeed. When?"

"About a year ago. A friend returning from South America gave it to me, and I couldn't take care of it, so I gave it to him."

"Mr. Getz lived at the Koven house?"

"Yes."

"Then actually you were dumping it onto Mrs. Koven. Did she appreciate it?"

"She has never said so. I didn't—I know I should have considered that. I apologized to her, and she was nice about it."

"Did Mr. Koven like the monkey?"

"He liked to tease it. But he didn't dislike it; he teased it just to annoy Mr. Getz."

Wolfe leaned back and clasped his hands behind his head. "You know, Miss Lowell, I did not find the Dazzle Dan saga hopelessly inane. There is a sustained sardonic tone, some fertility of invention, and even an occasional touch of imagination. Monday evening, while Mr. Goodwin was in jail, I telephoned a couple of people who are supposed to know things and was referred by them to others. I was told that it is generally believed, though not published, that the conception of Dazzle Dan was originally supplied to Mr. Koven by Mr. Getz, that Mr. Getz was the continuing source of inspiration for the story and pictures, and that without him Mr. Koven will be up a stump. What about it?"

Pat Lowell had stiffened. "Talk." She was scornful. "Just cheap talk."

"You should know." Wolfe

sounded relieved. "If that belief could be validated I admit I would be up a stump myself. To support my claim against Mr. Koven, and to discredit his against me, I need to demonstrate that Mr. Goodwin did not kill Mr. Getz, either accidentally or otherwise. If he didn't, then who did? One of you five. But all of you had a direct personal interest in the continued success of Dazzle Dan, sharing as you did in the prodigious proceeds; and if Mr. Getz was responsible for the success, why kill him?" Wolfe chuckled. "So you see I'm not silly at all. We've been at it only twenty minutes, and already you've helped me enormously. Give us another four or five hours, and we'll see. By the way."

He leaned forward to press a button at the edge of his desk, and in a moment Fritz appeared.

"There'll be a guest for dinner, Fritz."

"Yes, sir." Fritz went.

"Four or five hours?" Pat Lowell demanded.

"At least that. With a recess for dinner; I banish business from the table. Half for me and half for you. This affair is extremely complicated, and if you came here to get an agreement we'll have to cover it all. Let's see, where were we?"

She regarded him. "About Getz, I didn't say he had nothing to do with the success of Dazzle Dan. After all, so do I. I didn't say he won't be a loss. Everyone knows he was Mr. Koven's oldest and closest friend. We were all quite aware that Mr. Koven relied on him—"

Wolfe showed her a palm. "Please, Miss Lowell, don't spoil it for me. Don't give me a point and then try to snatch it back. Next you'll be saying that Koven called Getz 'the Squirt' to show his affection, as a man will call his dearest friend an old bastard, whereas I prefer to regard it as an inferiority complex, deeply resentful, showing its biceps. Or telling me that all of you, without exception, were inordinately fond of Mr. Getz and submissively grateful to him. Don't forget that Mr. Goodwin spent hours in that house among you and has fully reported to me; also you should know that I had a talk with Inspector Cramer on Monday evening and learned from him some of the plain facts, such as the pillow lying on the floor, scorched and pierced, showing that it had been used to muffle the sound of the shot, and the failure of all of you to prove lack of opportunity."

Wolfe kept going. "But if you insist on minimizing

Koven's dependence as a fact, let me assume it as a hypothesis in order to put a question. Say that Koven felt strongly about his debt to Getz and his reliance on him, that he proposed to do something about it, and that he found it necessary to confide in one of you people, to get help or advice. Which of you would he have come to? We must of course put his wife first, ex officio and to sustain convention—and anyway, out of courtesy I must suppose you incapable of revealing your employer's conjugal privities. Which of you three would he have come to—Mr. Hildebrand, Mr. Jordan, or you?"

Miss Lowell was wary. "On your hypothesis, you mean."

"Yes."

"None of us."

"But if he felt he had to?"

"Not with anything as intimate as that. He wouldn't have let himself have to. None of us three has ever got within miles of him on anything really personal."

"Surely he confides in you, his agent and manager?"

"On business matters, yes. Not on personal things."

"Why were all of you so concerned about the gun in his desk?"

"We weren't concerned, not really concerned—at least I wasn't. I just didn't like its

being there, loaded, so easy to get at, and I knew he didn't have a license for it."

Wolfe kept on about the gun for a good ten minutes—how often had she seen it, had she ever picked it up, and so forth, with special emphasis on Sunday morning, when she and Hildebrand had opened the drawer and looked at it. On that detail she corroborated Hildebrand as I had heard him tell it to Cramer. Finally she balked. She said they weren't getting anywhere, and she certainly wasn't going to stay for dinner if afterward it was only going to be more of the same.

Wolfe nodded in agreement. "You're quite right," he told her. "We've gone as far as we can, you and I. We need all of them. It's time for you to call Mr. Koven and tell him so. Tell him to be here at eight thirty with Mrs. Koven, Mr. Jordan, and Mr. Hildebrand."

She was staring at him. "Are you trying to be funny?" she demanded.

He skipped it. "I don't know," he said, "whether you can handle it properly; if not, I'll talk to him. The validity of my claim, and of his, depends primarily on who killed Mr. Getz. I now know who killed him. I'll have to sell the police but first I want to settle the

matter of my claim with Mr. Koven. Tell him that. Tell him that if I have to inform the police before I have a talk with him and the others there will be no compromise on my claim, and I'll collect it."

"This is a bluff."

"Then call it."

"I'm going to." She left the chair and got the coat around her. Her eyes blazed at him. "I'm not such a sap!" She started for the door.

"Get Inspector Cramer, Archie!" Wolfe snapped. He called, "They'll be there by the time you are!"

I lifted the phone and dialed. She was out in the hall, but I heard neither footsteps nor the door opening.

"Hello," I told the transmitter, loud enough. "Manhattan Homicide West? Inspector Cramer, please. This is—"

A hand darted past me, and a finger pressed the button down, and a mink coat dropped to the floor. "Damn you!" she said, hard and cold, but the hand was shaking so that the finger slipped off the button. I cradled the phone.

"Get Mr. Koven's number for her, Archie," Wolfe purred.

At twenty minutes to nine Wolfe's eyes moved slowly from left to right, to take in the faces of our assembled visitors. He

was in a nasty humor. He hated to work right after dinner, and from the way he kept his chin down and a slight twitch of a muscle in his cheek I knew it was going to be real work. Whether he had got them there with a bluff or not, it would take more than a bluff to rake in the pot he was after now.

Pat Lowell had not dined with us. Not only had she declined to come along to the dining room, she had also left untouched the tray which Fritz had taken to her in the office. Of course that got Wolfe's goat and probably got some pointed remarks from him, but I wasn't there to hear him because I had gone to the kitchen to check with Fritz on the operation of the installation made by Levay Recorders, Inc. That was the one part of the program that I clearly understood. I was still in the kitchen, rehearsing with Fritz, when the doorbell rang and I went to the front and found them there in a body. They got better hall service than I had got at their place, and also better chair service in the office.

When they were seated Wolfe took them in from left to right—Harry Koven in the red leather chair, then his wife, then Pat Lowell, and, after a gap, Pete Jordan and Byram Hildebrand over toward me. I

don't know what impression Wolfe got from his survey, but from where I sat it looked as if he was up against a united front.

"This time," Koven blurted; "you can't cook up a fancy lie with Goodwin. There are witnesses."

He was keyed up. I would have said he had had six drinks, maybe more.

"We won't get anywhere that way, Mr. Koven," Wolfe objected. "We're all tangled up, and it will take more than blather to get us loose. You don't want to pay me a million dollars. I don't want to lose my license. The police don't want to add another unsolved murder to the long list. The central and dominant factor is the violent death of Mr. Getz, and I propose to deal with that if we can get settled—"

"You told Miss Lowell you know who killed him. If so, why don't you tell the police?"

Wolfe's eyes narrowed. "You don't mean that, Mr. Koven—"

"You're damn right I mean it!"

"Then there's a misunderstanding. I heard Miss Lowell's talk with you on the phone, both ends of it. I got the impression that my threat to inform the police about Mr. Getz's death was what brought you here. Now you seem—"

"It wasn't any threat that brought me here! It's that blackmailing suit you started! I want to make you eat it and I'm going to!"

"Indeed. Then I gather that you don't care who gets my information first, you or the police. But I do. For one thing, when I talk to the police I like to be able—"

The doorbell rang. When visitors were present Fritz usually answered the door, but he had orders to stick to his post in the kitchen, so I got up and went to the hall and switched on the stoop light for a look through the one-way glass. One glance was enough. Stepping back into the office, I stood until Wolfe caught my eye.

"The man about the chair," I told him.

He frowned. "Tell him I'm—" He stopped, and the frown cleared. "No. I'll see him. If you'll excuse me a moment?" He pushed his chair back, made it to his feet, and detoured around Koven. I let him precede me into the hall and closed that door before joining him. He strode to the front, peered through the glass, and opened the door. The chain bolt stopped it at a crack of two inches.

Wolfe spoke through the crack. "Well, sir?"

Inspector Cramer's voice was anything but friendly. "I'm coming in."

"I doubt it. What for?"

"Patricia Lowell entered here at six o'clock and is still here. The other four entered fifteen minutes ago. I told you Monday evening to lay off. I told you your license was suspended, and here you are with your office full. I'm coming in."

"I still doubt it. I have no client. My job for Mr. Koven, which you know about, has been finished, and I have sent him a bill. These people are here to discuss an action for damages which I have brought against Mr. Koven. I don't need a license for that. I'm shutting the door."

He tried to, but it didn't budge. I could see the tip of Cramer's toe at the bottom of the crack.

"By God, this does it," Cramer said savagely. "You're through."

"I thought I was already through. But this—"

"I can't hear you! The wind."

"This is preposterous, talking through a crack. Descend to the sidewalk, and I'll come out. Did you hear that?"

"Yes."

"Very well. To the sidewalk."

Wolfe marched to the big old walnut rack and reached for his overcoat. After I had held it for him and handed him his hat, I got my coat and slipped into it and then took a look through the glass. The stoop was empty. A burly figure was at the bottom of the steps. I unbolted the door and opened it, followed Wolfe over the sill, pulled the door shut, and made sure it was locked. A gust of wind pounced on us, slashing at us with sleet. I wanted to take Wolfe's elbow as we went down the steps, thinking where it would leave me if he fell and cracked his skull, but knew I hadn't better.

He made it safely, got his back to the sleety wind, which meant that Cramer had to face it, and raised his voice. "I don't like fighting a blizzard, so let's get to the point. You don't want these people talking with me, but there's nothing you can do about it. You have blundered and you know it. You arrested Mr. Goodwin on a trumpery charge. You came and blustered me and went too far. Now you're afraid I'm going to explode Mr. Koven's lies. More, you're afraid I'm going to catch a murderer and toss him to the District Attorney. So you—"

"I'm not afraid of a damn thing." Cramer was squinting to protect his eyes from the

cutting sleet. "I told you to lay off, and by God you're going to. Your suit against Koven is a phony."

"It isn't, but let's stick to the point. I'm uncomfortable. I am not an outdoors man. You want to enter my house. You may, under a condition. The five callers are in my office. There is a hole in the wall, concealed from view in the office by what is apparently a picture. Standing, or on a stool, in a nook at the end of the hall, you can see and hear us in the office. The condition is that you enter quietly—confound it!"

The wind had taken his hat. I made a quick dive and stab but missed, and away it went. He had only had it fourteen years.

"The condition," he repeated, "is that you enter quietly, take your post in the nook, oversee us from there, and give me half an hour. Thereafter you will be free to join us if you think you should. I warn you not to be impetuous. Up to a certain point your presence would make it harder for me, if not impossible, and I doubt if you'll know when that point is reached. I'm after a murderer, and there's one chance in five, I should say, that I'll get him. I want—"

"I thought you said you were discussing an action for damages."

"We are. I'll get either the murderer or the damages. Do you want to harp on that?"

"No."

"You've cooled off, and no wonder, in this hurricane. My hair will go next. I'm going in. If you come along it must be under the condition as stated. Are you coming?"

"Yes."

Wolfe headed for the steps. I passed him to go ahead and unlock the door. When they were inside I closed it and put the bolt back on. They hung up their coats, and Wolfe took Cramer down the hall and around the corner to the nook. I brought a stool from the kitchen, but Cramer shook his head. Wolfe slid the panel aside, making no sound, looked through, and nodded to Cramer. Cramer took a look and nodded back, and we left him. At the door to the office Wolfe muttered about his hair, and I let him use my pocket comb.

From the way they looked at us as we entered you might have thought they suspected we had been in the cellar fusing a bomb, but one more suspicion wouldn't make it any harder. I circled to my desk and sat. Wolfe got himself back in place, and passed his eyes over them.

"I'm sorry," he said politely, "but that was unavoidable. Suppose we start over"—he looked at Koven—"say, with your surmise to the police that Getz was shot by Mr. Goodwin accidentally in a scuffle. That's absurd. Getz was shot with a cartridge that had been taken from your gun and put into Goodwin's gun. Manifestly Goodwin couldn't have done that, since when he first saw your gun Getz was already dead. Therefore—"

"That's not true!" Koven cut in. "He had seen it before, when he came to my office. He could have gone back later and got the cartridges."

Wolfe glared at him in astonishment. "Do you really dare, sir, in front of me, to my face, to cling to that fantastic tale you told the police? That rigmarole?"

"You're damn right I do!"

"Pfui." Wolfe was disgusted. "I had hoped, here together, we were prepared to get down to reality. It would have been better to adopt your suggestion to take my information to the police. Perhaps—"

"I made no such suggestion!"

"In this room, Mr. Koven, some fifteen minutes ago?"

"No!"

Wolfe made a face. "I see," he said quietly. "It's impossible

to get on solid ground with a man like you, but I still have to try. Archie, bring the tape from the kitchen, please?"

I went. I didn't like it. I thought he was rushing in. Granting that he had been jostled off his stride by Cramer's arrival, I felt that it was far from one of his best performances, and this looked like a situation where nothing less than his best would do. So I went to the kitchen, passing Cramer in his nook without a glance, told Fritz to stop the machine and wind, and stood and scowled at it turning. When it stopped I removed the wheel and slipped it into a carton and, carton in hand, returned to the office.

"We're waiting," Wolfe said curtly.

That hurried me. There was a stack of similar cartons on my desk, and in my haste I knocked them over as I was putting down the one I had brought. It was embarrassing with all eyes on me, and I gave them a cold look as I crossed to the cabinet to get the player. It needed a whole corner of my desk, and I had to shove the tumbled cartons aside to make room. Finally, I had the player in position and connected, and the wheel of tape, taken from the carton, in place.

"All right?" I asked Wolfe.

"Go ahead."

I flipped the switch. There was a crackle and a little spitting, and then Wolfe's voice came:

"It's not that, Mr. Koven, not at all. I doubt if it's worth it to you, considering the size of my minimum fee, to hire me for anything so trivial as finding a stolen gun, or even discovering the thief. I should think—"

"No!" Wolfe bellowed.

I switched it off. I was flustered. "Excuse it," I said. "The wrong tape."

"Must I do it myself?" Wolfe asked sarcastically.

I muttered something, turning the wheel to rewind. I removed it, pawed among the cartons, picked one, took out the wheel, put it on, and turned the switch. This time the voice that came on was not Wolfe's but Koven's—loud and clear.

"This time you can't cook up a fancy lie with Goodwin. There are witnesses."

Then Wolfe's: *"We won't get anywhere that way, Mr. Koven. We're all tangled up, and it will take more than blather to get us loose. You don't want to pay me a million dollars. I don't want to lose my license. The police don't want to add another unsolved murder to the long list. The central and dominant factor is the violent death of Mr. Getz, and I*

propose to deal with that if we can get settled—”

Koven's: “*You told Miss Lowell you know who killed him. If so, why don't you tell the police?*”

Wolfe: “*You don't mean that, Mr. Koven—”*

Koven: “*You're damn right I mean it!*”

Wolfe: “*Then there's a misunderstanding. I heard Miss Lowell's talk with you on the phone, both ends of it. I got the impression that my threat to inform the police—”*

“That's enough!” Wolfe called. I turned it off. Wolfe looked at Koven. “I would call that,” he said dryly, “a suggestion that I take my information to the police. Wouldn't you?”

Koven wasn't saying: Wolfe's eyes moved. “Wouldn't you, Miss Lowell?”

She shook her head. “I'm not an expert on suggestions.”

Wolfe left her. “We won't quarrel over terms, Mr. Koven. You heard it. Incidentally, about the other tape you heard the start of through Mr. Goodwin's clumsiness, you may wonder why I haven't given it to the police to refute you. Monday evening, when Inspector Cramer came to see me, I still considered you as my client and I didn't want to discomfit you until I heard what you had to say. Before Mr. Cramer left

he had made himself so offensive that I was disinclined to tell him anything whatever. Now you are no longer my client. We'll discuss this matter realistically or not at all. I don't care to badger you into an explicit statement that you lied to the police; I'll leave that to you and them; I merely insist that we proceed on the basis of what we both know to be the truth. With that understood—”

“Wait a minute,” Pat Lowell put in. “The gun was in the drawer Sunday morning. I saw it.”

“I know you did. That's one of the knots in the tangle, and we'll come to it.” His eyes swept the arc. “We want to know who killed Adrian Getz. Let's get at it. What do we know about him or her? We know a lot.

“First, he took Koven's gun from the drawer sometime previous to last Friday and kept it somewhere. For that gun was put back in the drawer when Goodwin's was removed shortly before Getz was killed, and cartridges from it were placed in Goodwin's gun.

“Second, the thought of Getz continuing to live was for some reason so repugnant to the murderer as to be intolerable.

“Third, he knew the purpose of Koven's visit here Saturday

evening, and of Goodwin's errand at the Koven house on Monday, and he knew the details of the procedure planned by Koven and Goodwin. Only with—"

"I don't know them even yet," Hildebrand squeaked.

"Neither do I," Pete Jordan declared.

"The innocent can afford ignorance," Wolfe told them. "Enjoy it if you have it. Only with that knowledge could he have devised his intricate scheme and carried it out.

"Fourth, his mental processes are devious but defective. His deliberate and spectacular plan to make it appear that Goodwin had killed Getz, while ingenious in some respects, was in others witless. Going to Koven's office to get Goodwin's gun from the drawer and placing Koven's gun there, transferring the cartridges from Koven's gun to Goodwin's, proceeding to the room below to find Getz asleep, shooting him in the head, using a pillow to muffle the sound—all that was well enough, competently conceived and executed, but then what? Wanting to make sure that the gun would be quickly found on the spot, a quite unnecessary precaution, he slipped it into the monkey's cage. That was probably improvisation and utterly brainless.

Mr. Goodwin couldn't possibly be such a vapid fool.

"Fifth, he hated the monkey deeply and bitterly, either on its own account or because of its association with Getz. Having just killed a man, and needing to leave the spot with all possible speed, he went and opened a window, from only one conceivable motive. That took a peculiar, unexampled malevolence. I admit it was effective. Miss Lowell tells me the monkey is dying.

"Sixth, he placed Koven's gun in the drawer Sunday morning and, after it had been seen there, took it out again. That was the most remarkable stratagem of all. Since there was no point in putting it there unless it was to be seen, he arranged that it should be seen. Why? It could only have been that he already knew what was to happen on Monday when Mr. Goodwin came, he had already conceived his scheme for framing Goodwin for the homicide, and he thought he was arranging in advance to discredit Goodwin's story. So he not only put the gun in the drawer Sunday morning, he also made sure its presence would be noted—and not, of course, by Mr. Koven."

Wolfe focused on one of them. "You saw the gun in the drawer Sunday morning, Mr.

Hildebrand?"

"Yes." The squeak was off pitch. "But I didn't put it there!"

"I didn't say you did. Your claim to innocence has not yet been challenged. You were in the workroom, went up to consult Mr. Koven, encountered Mrs. Koven one flight up, were told by her that Mr. Koven was still in bed, ascended to the office, found Miss Lowell there, and you pulled the drawer open and both of you saw the gun there. Is that correct?"

"I didn't go up there to look in that drawer. We just—"

"Stop meeting accusations that haven't been made. It's a bad habit. Had you been upstairs earlier that morning?"

"No!"

"Had he, Miss Lowell?"

"Not that I know of." She spoke slowly, with a drag, as if she had only so many words and had to count them. "Our looking into the drawer was only incidental."

"Had he, Mrs. Koven?"

The wife jerked her head up. "Had he what?" she demanded.

"Had Mr. Hildebrand been upstairs earlier that morning?"

She looked bewildered. "Earlier than what?"

"You met him in the second-floor hall and told him that your husband was still in bed and that Miss Lowell was

up in the office. Had he been upstairs before that? That morning?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Then you don't say that he had been?"

"I know nothing about it."

"There's nothing as safe as ignorance—or as dangerous." Wolfe spread his gaze again. "To complete the list of what we know about the murderer. Seventh and last, his repugnance to Getz was so extreme that he even scorned the risk that by killing Getz he might be killing Dazzle Dan. How essential Getz was to Dazzle Dan—"

"I made Dazzle Dan!" Harry Koven roared. "Dazzle Dan is mine!" He was glaring at everybody. "I am Dazzle Dan!"

"For God's sake, shut up, Harry!" Pat Lowell said.

Koven's chin was quivering. He needed three quick drinks.

"I was saying," Wolfe went on, "that I do not know how essential Getz was to Dazzle Dan. The testimony conflicts. In any case the murderer wanted him dead. I've identified the murderer for you by now, surely?"

"You have not," Pat Lowell said aggressively.

"Then I'll specify." Wolfe leaned forward at them. "But first let me say a word for the police, particularly Mr. Cramer.

He is quite capable of unravelling a tangle like this, with its superficial complexities. What flummoxed him was Mr. Koven's elaborate lie, apparently corroborated by Miss Lowell and Mr. Hildebrand. If he had had the gumption to proceed on the assumption that Mr. Goodwin and I were telling the truth and all of it, he would have found it simple. This should be a lesson to him."

Wolfe considered a moment. "It might be better to specify by elimination. If you recall my list of seven facts about the murderer, that is child's play. Mr. Jordan, for instance, is eliminated by Number Six; he wasn't there Sunday morning. Mr. Hildebrand is eliminated by three or four of them, especially Number Six again; he had made no earlier trip upstairs. Miss Lowell is eliminated, for me, by Numbers Four and Five; and I am convinced that none of the three I have named can meet the requirements of Number Three. I do not believe that Mr. Koven would have confided in any of them so intimately—"

"Hold it!" The gruff voice came from the doorway.

Heads jerked around. Cramer advanced and stopped at Koven's left, between him and his wife. There was dead silence. Koven had his neck

twisted to stare up at Cramer, then suddenly he fell apart and buried his face in his hands.

Cramer, scowling at Wolfe, boiling with rage, spoke. "Damn you, if you had given it to us! You and your numbers game!"

"I can't give you what you won't take," Wolfe said biting-ly. "You can have her now. Do you want more help? Mr. Koven was still in bed Sunday morning when two of them saw the gun in the drawer. More? Spend the night interrogating Mr. Hildebrand; I'll stake my license against your badge that he'll remember that when he spoke with Mrs. Koven in the hall she said something that caused him to open the drawer and look at the gun. Still more? Take all the contents of her room to your laboratory. She must have hid the gun among her intimate things, and you should find evidence. You can't put him on the stand and ask him if and when he told her what he was doing; he can't testify against his wife; but—"

Mrs. Koven stood up. She was pale but under control, perfectly steady. She looked down at the back of her husband's bent head.

Cramer, "in one short step, was at her elbow.

"Harry!" she said, softly insistent. "Take me home."

His head lifted and turned to look at her. I couldn't see his face. "Sit down, Marcy," he said. "I'll handle this." He looked at Wolfe. "If you've got a record of what I said here Saturday, all right. I lied to the cops. So what? I didn't want to—"

"Be quiet, Harry," Pat Lowell blurted at him. "Get a lawyer and let him talk. Don't say anything."

Wolfe nodded. "That's good advice. Especially, Mr. Koven, since I hadn't quite finished. It is a matter of record that Mr. Getz not only owned the house you live in but also that he owned Dazzle Dan and permitted you to take only ten per cent of the proceeds."

Mrs. Koven dropped back into the chair and froze, staring at him. Wolfe spoke to her. "I suppose, madam, that after you killed him you went to his room to look for documents and possibly found some and destroyed them. That must have been part of your plan last week when you first took the gun from the drawer—to destroy all evidence of his ownership of Dazzle Dan after killing him. That was foolish, since a man like Mr. Getz would surely not leave invaluable papers in so accessible a spot, and they will certainly be found; we can leave that to Mr.

Cramer. When I said it is a matter of record, I meant a record that I have inspected and have in my possession."

Wolfe pointed. "That stack of stuff on that table is Dazzle Dan for the past three years. In one episode, repeated annually with variations, he buys peaches from two characters named Aggie Ghool and Haggie Krool, and Aggie Ghool, saying that she owns the tree, gives Haggie Krool ten per cent of the amount received and pockets the rest. A.G. are the initials of Adrian Getz; H.K. are the initials of Harry Koven. It is not credible that that is coincidence or merely a prank, especially since the episode was repeated annually. Mr. Getz must have had a singularly contorted psyche, taking delight as he did in hiding the fact of his ownership and control of that monster, but compelling the nominal owner to publish it each year in a childish allegory. For a meager ten per cent of the—"

"Not of the net," Koven objected. "Ten per cent of the gross. Over four hundred a week clear, and I—"

He stopped. His wife had said, "You worm." Leaving her chair, she stood looking down at him.

"You worm!" she said in bitter contempt. "Not even a

worm. Worms have guts."

She whirled to face Wolfe. "All right, you've got him. The one time he ever acted like a man, and he didn't have the guts to see it through. Getz owned Dazzle Dan, that's right. When he got the idea and sold it, years ago, and took Harry in to draw it and front it, Harry should have insisted on an even split right then and didn't. He never had it in him to insist on anything, and never would, and Getz knew it. When Dazzle Dan caught on, and the years went by and it kept getting bigger and bigger, Getz didn't mind Harry having the name and the fame as long as he owned it and got the money. You said he had a contorted psyche; maybe that was it, only that's not what I'd call it. Getz was a vampire."

"I'll accept that," Wolfe said.

"That's the way it was when I met Harry, but I didn't know it until we were married, two years ago. I admit Getz might not have got killed if it hadn't been for me. When I found out how it was I tried to talk sense into Harry. I told him his name had been connected with Dazzle Dan so long that Getz would have to give him a bigger share, at least half, if he demanded it. He claimed he tried, but he just wasn't man enough. I told him his name

was so well known that he could cut loose and start another one on his own, but he wasn't man enough for that, either. He's not a man, he's a worm. I didn't let up. I kept after him, I admit that. I'll admit it on the witness stand if I have to. And I admit I didn't know him as well as I thought I did. I didn't know there was any danger of making him desperate enough to commit murder. I didn't know he had it in him. Of course he'll break down, but if he says I knew that he had decided to kill Getz I'll have to deny it because it's not true. I didn't."

Her husband was staring up at her, his mouth hanging open.

"I see." Wolfe's voice was hard and cold. "First you plan to put it on a stranger, Mr. Goodwin—indeed, two strangers, for I am in it, too. That failing, you put it on your husband." He shook his head. "No, madam. Your silliest mistake was opening the window to kill the monkey, but there were others. Mr. Cramer?"

Cramer had to take only one step to get her arm.

"Oh God!" Koven groaned.

Pat Lowell said to Wolfe in a thin sharp voice, "So this is what you worked me for."

She was a tough baby, too, that girl.

Anthony Gilbert

Cat Among the Pigeons

Another of Anthony Gilbert's "pure" crime stories—although you will find variations of technique in this one. Anthony Gilbert's crime stories cannot be called "inverted detective stories"—not by any stretch. Perhaps they can be called "converted detective stories," or possibly "diverted detective stories." But whatever new name is applied to them, they are always searching studies of people, sharp fiction-photos of crimes committed or to be committed.

In this story the background is so convincingly depicted that the story gives a sense of first-hand knowledge of the milieu—The Folly, a kind of nursing home for aging women—no mental cases, of course, and "only the best people" . . .

I want to write everything down now, while the facts are still clear in my mind, before time and the usual routine have dulled the edges—or before I begin to tell myself it can't be true. Because that would be the final betrayal. And there's no time to lose because Miss Emily will try to get in first, and there's no question which of us Mrs. Gates will listen to.

Not that it matters, as I don't mean to stay in any event. I shall ask for my cards first thing, and then I shall go to London. Newspapers must have records going back and

back, even 20 years, and before I start thinking what to do next I want to know everything—everything that happened . . .

Here goes, then. My name is Caroline Flynn, and I've been a nurse at Gates's Folly for the past two years. It's not a real nursing home—there are only two professionals on the staff, and even we don't wear uniforms in the ordinary way. The "guests" are all aging women who can't cope any longer and whose families would sooner open their purses than their front doors. No mental cases, you understand, and Mrs. Gates advertises that

she takes only the best people.

It's one of her rules that if a guest needs constant nursing—illness or accident, say—she either goes to the hospital or has a "special" at her own expense, and as most of them are terrified of finding their rooms let in their absence they generally opt for a "special." These come from a local Nursing Register and you take what you can get.

I was surprised rather than flattered when Mrs. Gates told me that Emily Brown—Miss Emily we called her—had asked if she could have me for her special when she broke her hip. Mrs. Gates looked a bit surprised, too, but then I was never one of her pets.

"It's against my normal practice," she said, "but in this instance I have agreed. Miss Brown tells me she finds it very difficult to accustom herself to strangers."

What she meant, of course, was that the old thing would wear out a special in 48 hours, whereas on the staff you have to take it and look as if you liked it.

Old Emily was all abeam. "I'm so glad Matron agreed to my little suggestion," she said.

Mind you, I didn't care at the time—quite a change, I thought, from the endless round of bedpans and tea trays

which is what being a nurse in this sort of establishment entails—which is why you never find the dedicated kind on the staff. But by the second week I was wondering how soon I could ask to be relieved. Any special can ask for an exchange of patients at the end of a month, or even three weeks if it's very heavy work; but I didn't fancy Mrs. Gates's expression if I tried to opt out after only ten days.

The trouble about being a special is you're on duty all the working day, and it was the incessant yap, yap, yap and never a chance to talk to anyone else that was getting me down. Miss Emily was rather an unusual person to find at The Folly—I mean, there was nothing of the "best families" about her. When she told me she'd been a governess I said, "I thought they went out with Jane Eyre," but she said that there are still pockets out in the long grass where two or three households will club together and share a governess—till the kids are old enough to go to prep school, that is.

"Didn't you ever want to work in a school?" I said, but she told me, a bit frostily, that she preferred living with a family.

"Mine's been a lonely life," she invited, but I wasn't being

drawn. I could have told her something about loneliness, having been on my own since my mother married the last of the "uncles" who were our protectors. I haven't seen her—my mother, I mean—for nearly 15 years. But that sort of story doesn't do you any good, so I kept my trap shut.

"Why don't any of your pupils ever come to see you?" I asked, because that was another thing—she never had any visitors. Most of the guests had sisters or daughters or nieces who drove up in posh cars and started yelling like banshees before they were over the doorstep how lucky Mums or Auntie Flo or darling Irene was to be here, waited on hand and foot—but Miss Emily, no. And her only letters were official envelopes that came once a month—from a lawyer, we decided.

"Do think what you're saying, Caroline. Do you ever give a thought to your schoolteachers now you're grown up?" She began to laugh, wobbling like jelly; she's half the size of an elephant, anyway.

But if Miss Emily's pupils didn't remember her she never stopped thinking about them. They were her hobby. She kept a huge scrapbook into which she pasted every reference to them she could track down, and

sometimes, if it was a fairly ordinary name, she'd take a chance and put it in.

"Sir William Jones," she'd say. "I wonder if that could be little Willie Jones—he's just the sort who would get a K.C.B." And out would come the scrapbook and she'd put a stubby finger on the photograph of some ugly little kid of about seven and ask me, "Don't you see the likeness?" They mostly looked like zoo specimens to me; but I had to hand it to her—she could tell them apart.

It was one of my chores to go through the social pages of the *Record* and the *Post* every day and read out engagements, weddings, and obituaries. Now and again she discovered one of her darlings wasn't really one of her little pets, and then whole columns had to be ripped out and she more or less went into mourning for the day. I tell you, it would have got the Marx Brothers down. It got so that every day was 48 hours long and every hour had 100 minutes.

I was even thankful when I had to give her a rubdown against bed sores or brush her scraggly locks. Roll on, Death, I'd think, because where's the sense in people like her? I bet nothing important had ever happened to her in 70 years.

Only it turned out I was wrong . . .

It's still hard to believe that it's only a few hours since the whole world turned topsy-turvy. The day had seemed just as usual—yap, yap, natter, natter. Then her weekly *Gossip* arrived and I started to go through it, and I came to a dead stop.

I'd seen the picture of a girl who looked as every girl looks in her private dream. She was beautiful, and her happiness stuck out like a broken bone. I was so absorbed by her I didn't realize at first that Miss Emily was talking.

"Taking a nap, Caroline?" My head came up with a jerk; it was staggering to realize that the same world could hold two such different people.

"Take a dekko," I offered, passing her the paper. "Beauty without the beast. Did you ever?"

She stared at it for a minute. The caption said: *Miss Jane Rush, daughter of the late Richard Rush and Lady (John) Heather, whose engagement to—someone-or-other—has just been announced.*

"Well?" I demanded. "Knocks you for six, doesn't she?"

Miss Emily's unfocused gaze came back to my face. "She's

very pretty," she admitted, "but not a patch on her mother at the same age."

"Do me a favor," I began but she was bawling for her scrapbook, and when I brought it to her she began digging through the pages like a dog hunting for a bone, and panting like a dog, too.

"There!" she said, and I looked, and believe it or not, she was right. This girl was Jane Plus, if you can credit it. Except that she hadn't got the glow—as if she swung the earth like a trinket at her wrist.

This caption read: *Miss Rose Benyon, niece of the dead woman.* And under it, in Miss Emily's stubby black script: *Dear Rose at the time of the case.*

"What case was that?" I asked. "Who was the dead woman and how did she die?" Because it was obvious there was a mystery here; you don't get your picture in the paper just because you're a raving beauty and your aunt is dead.

"Oh, it was a long time ago," Miss Emily murmured—and already she was halfway across the border between the past and the present. "Harriet Benyon died of an overdose of sleeping pills and—"

"And someone suggested she hadn't taken them herself?" I began to wake up. This was the

first promising conversation I'd ever had with Miss Emily.

"Of course she took them herself. The question was whether it was by design or accident, and that's a point no one has ever cleared up."

"Why should she take them on purpose?" I asked. (And if she had, wouldn't she have left a note or something? They say suicides always do.)

"It's a long story," said Miss Emily evasively. But she was in a state of excitement—you could see that with half an eye.

"We've got a long time till supper," I reminded her.

They say you need the patience of Job to catch a salmon, but Job wasn't in it with me trying to winkle the story out of Emily Brown. Still, in the end, she capitulated. In a sense, she was burning to talk about it. It wasn't always easy to follow her—she kept dodging about, saying She did this and She thought that, until it was difficult to know who She was. But this is what it boiled down to . . .

Harriet Benyon and Emily Brown met during the war when they were both in London. All the kids had been evacuated, of course, and Miss Emily had a job in some government department—in those days a monkey could

have got a job provided it hadn't got a tail—and the two of them worked in the same room.

Why Harriet hadn't gone down to the country when her darling Rose was evacuated with her school was anyone's guess. She didn't need the money—she had £30,000 that were eventually to come to Rose; perhaps she was a patriot, whatever that may be when it's at home.

Anyhow, Harriet and Emily met and later, when a bomb destroyed Emily's *pension*, she moved into a vacant room in Miss Benyon's flat. At the end of the war, when Miss Emily was wondering "What next?"—private governesses of 50 were "out" and temporary civil servants of the same age were ten a penny—Miss Benyon told her she'd be buying a house in the country for herself and dear Rose, and if she liked, Miss Emily could come along, too.

"As a chatelaine," Miss Emily told me, which is French for cook-housekeeper. But she accepted.

"Even before I saw Rose, I was really tired of London, and once I met her I'd have done it for half the money."

Because it was a case of love at first sight. Rose must have been about the same age as the girl in the *Gossip* picture—"Of

all the girls I ever met she was the one I would have wanted for my own daughter," Old Emily said.

And Miss Benyon seems to have felt the same way, so it wasn't surprising if Rose wanted a life of her own. She didn't have to work—her baker's bill would be paid for her all her days, and with her looks she could have got married once a week even without any money; but all the young people were working now, and Rose wanted to be "with it."

Miss Benyon was one of those dominating spinsters—you meet a lot in the nursing profession—who wanted the best for their darlings; but it had to be *their* best, and the best, in her opinion, was Sir John Heather.

"I always thought she was somewhat precipitate," Miss Emily said. "Dear Rose was very young, and to nineteen anyone of thirty-five must seem quite elderly."

Thirty-five! My age precisely. Thank you, Miss Brown, I thought.

Anyway, on this point Rose and her aunt didn't see eye to eye. Rose's fancy had fallen on a man named Richard Rush.

"He was a painter," explained Miss Emily, meaning an artist. "In those days he was quite unknown—it was only

after his death in an air crash that they began holding posthumous exhibitions of his work, and now I believe even a small canvas of his is quite valuable."

I knew something about Richard Rush. I'd once nursed the wife of a picture dealer, and they thought he was the tops. Mind you, I couldn't see it myself. I mean, there'd be three panels of black paint, called "Soul's Progress," and if you asked what that meant you'd be told, "Can't you see each panel is a different shade of black?"

Goodness knows, I wasn't carrying any banners for Miss Benyon but I couldn't help seeing her point, particularly as it turned out that this Rush creature was anything but cooperative. He had no money and he didn't seem interested in earning any. Miss Benyon discovered that he'd turned down a contract with a big advertising firm—paintings for a brewery, I think they were—on the ground that he was an artist, not a publican's pimp, and there was too little time in one life to waste on commercial art.

"He really didn't care about money," Miss Emily insisted. "Harriet used to say he wanted Rose for what she had, but I'm still sure she was wrong."

"I know about these fellows who're too superior to be

interested in money," I told Miss Emily. "It doesn't stop them being interested in food and clothes and even luxuries here and there. They just don't want to know who pays for such things."

"Perhaps people like ourselves don't understand artists," Miss Emily said. "Mind you, I did think he might have used a little more finesse—a great deal depended on Harriet, so he could have shown a *little* tact."

Done a little bootlicking, that was what she meant. I decided Miss Benyon had been a proper old bitch, and I almost wished Rose *had* poisoned her; then I remembered someone had and I cheered up again.

"Nothing would shake Harriet from her conviction that what he wanted was Rose's money. So she decided to let her see what would happen if he knew that Rose wouldn't have a penny. She actually wrote to Mr. Cass, her lawyer, telling him she was going to redraft her will, leaving everything to the National Trust; she said people could disappoint or betray, but the land was always faithful."

"Didn't she care a bit about Rose's happiness?" I asked, since it was obvious the girl was over the moon with love.

"You mustn't think that, Caroline; it was just that she

believed this was the best way to preserve it. Personally, I didn't think Mr. Cass would allow her to do it."

"And did he?" I asked.

"It never got to that. He was away for a few days just then and by the time he came back the fat was in the fire—that is, Miss Benyon was dead."

I'll swear that by this stage Miss Emily didn't even notice me as an individual; she'd gone back 20 years, and now she was like someone on a runaway horse—she couldn't stop if she wanted to. Not that I wanted her to: I never could put down a mystery book till I'd read the last chapter.

"I'll never forget that day," she said. "It was a Wednesday—I remember particularly because it was the cheap ticket day on the railways. I was going up to London to meet a pal I'd made in the war. She'd married and gone overseas, but she was back for a few days, and we'd had this arrangement for some time. I was on tenterhooks in case Miss Benyon wouldn't let me go. She'd slipped on some polished linoleum a few days before and broken her ankle which, while not dangerous, made her pretty helpless. It was because of that she had the sleeping pills.

"I used to give her two each evening, because the doctor said

it was important she should sleep well. That was Dr. Moss—she could twist him round her finger."

And, of course, it's never wise to offend a rich patient, I thought.

Miss Emily was charging ahead. "Did I say that Rose had left the house by this time? She'd joined a friend in a flat; she said she might not be able to get married without her aunt's consent—she was two years under age, you remember—but that didn't mean she had to live under the same roof.

"Well, the day came and I think Miss Benyon rather hoped I might offer to stay on, but I didn't. There was Maria—she was the maid, and come what might Miss Benyon always had a servant whoever else might go without; and I took care of absolutely everything before I left—changed her library book, filled her thermos with hot milk, in case I missed the earlier of the two return trains, left everything spick and span. She was an absolute gorgon about neatness in a sickroom, and off I went.

"Of course, I missed the earlier train back—well, my friend and I had a lot to talk about; she'd married a psychologist and she had plenty to say about Miss Benyon's attitude toward Rose—I only wish I

could have repeated some of it to Harriet.

"So, as I was telling you, it was quite late when I got back. Maria was in the hall, obviously bursting with some sensation. I had an awful feeling Harriet might have tried to get out of bed and fallen and broken her other ankle, but it was nothing like that. She's all right, Maria told me, though it's lucky for her she's got a heart like a stone. If it had been you or me, Miss Brown, with all that hammer-and-tonging till I thought the roof would fly off, we'd be flat out on our backs; but not Miss Benyon.

"I couldn't imagine what she was talking about. I knew Harriet far too well to suppose she'd indulge in a slanging match with the servant. And of course I was right. Maria said scornfully, 'I wouldn't waste the breath, Miss Brown. No, it was Miss Rose.'

"I caught hold of the bannisters. I thought I was going to pass out. 'Rose—here?' I said, and Maria grinned. It appears Rose had turned up without so much as a phone call. She must have known I wouldn't be there, because she told Maria she thought it was a good opportunity to talk to her aunt without interruption, and up she went and the hammer-and-tonging began.

"Mind you, I should discount at least half of what Maria said—even the part she repeated on oath; she couldn't possibly have heard, unless she had her ear up against the door. I never did like that girl."

"You can't blame her," I urged. "There's not all that drama in life, you know."

Any other time Miss Emily would have fired up at that, but like I said, she didn't even realize I was there. If I'd turned into a bedpost she wouldn't have noticed the difference.

"One of the things she repeated was—'You'll only marry him over my dead body.' That was Harriet, of course. And Rose's reply, 'If that's the only way I can get him, that's the way it'll have to be.' When Maria took in the tea tray Harriet said, 'You should have brought a little arsenic with you, my dear.' Still, they must have come to some kind of terms because Rose stayed quite late—waiting to see me, according to Maria.

"When at last she came down she said to Maria, 'Miss Benyon won't be wanting any supper. She'll just have her milk, and she's got a tin of biscuits. And when Miss Brown comes in, she doesn't want to be disturbed. I've given her two sleeping pills and put the bottle on the shelf.'

"That last sentence," brooded Miss Emily, "turned out to be the crux of the case. I peeped in on my way up to bed, all the same. Maria might say Miss Benyon didn't want to be disturbed, but if the pills hadn't worked and she was lying awake and she heard me go by—well, she'd have blown me skyhigh next morning.

"I went in like a mouse. The little blue lamp was on as always—she couldn't bear to sleep in the dark. But there wasn't a sound from the bed. I took off my shoes and crept round in my stocking feet. I just tidied things up—she was a terrible fuzzer, said she couldn't bear waking up in the morning surrounded by the paraphernalia of the sickroom. I washed the thermos and glass, straightened the counterpane, and put a bottle back on the shelf."

"The sleeping pills?" I asked.

"I don't know. That's the truth, I honestly don't know. There was another bottle, some medicine she used to take, and they were very much alike. Of course, in daylight it was easy to distinguish them, because one had a red label and one a white; but in that blue gleam and being anxious to get away before she woke up and started telling me about Rose, I simply didn't notice. That's what I told them at the inquest."

"Did they believe you?" I asked, and she said simply, "They must have or they wouldn't have brought in the verdict they did. Death from the administration of an overdose, without sufficient evidence to show how this was administered—something long-winded like that. The coroner, who was dead set against Rose from the start, tried to bully me. It's no use, I told him, I wasn't sure when I came into this court and nothing's happened to make me any surer now.

"Rose was legally represented—I saw to that. Her counsel insisted that it would be an easy mistake for a girl who wasn't accustomed to a sickroom."

I saw she had just jumped over the actual death. "Was it you who found her?" I said. "Miss Benyon, I mean."

"No, that was Maria. I found myself so disturbed by the news that Rose had been there in my absence that I took a sleeping pill myself—not one of Harriet's—and the next thing I knew Maria was shaking my shoulder and screaming like a banshee. Stop that noise, I told her, it's enough to wake the dead. Only it turned out that was the one thing it couldn't do.

"She'd gone in with a cup of early morning tea, and she

couldn't rouse Harriet, and as soon as I got in, still feeling a bit muzzy, I understood why. Get Dr. Moss, I told her; don't give an opinion—we're not professionals—just tell him it's urgent.

"As a matter of fact, it was Dr. Moss's partner, Dr. Stewart, who came. Harriet could never endure him. Doctors should put on a sympathetic act even if they don't feel it, she used to say. And certainly he was a very brusque young man.

"I suppose it was her heart?" I said, and then that fool Maria started to yell that it was Rose who'd killed her.

"Stop having hysterics," I commanded. If the doctor hadn't been there I'd have slapped her face. "Don't pay any attention to Maria," I went on, "she doesn't know what she's saying."

"I never heard you were a psychologist, Miss Brown," Dr. Stewart said—it was no wonder that Miss Benyon couldn't take to him. "And I should prefer Maria to tell me herself what she did mean."

"So out it all came—Maria didn't miss a trick, she must have spent half her time listening at doors. Richard and Harriet and the money. She was like one of those old wives who know everything, but know most of it wrong."

"What did she die of?" I insisted.

"And Stewart told me airily, 'I think we'll have to leave that to the coroner's jury, Miss Brown. Oh, yes, I shall have to report this as an "unnatural death." Don't say anything, either of you. The matter's really out of our hands now.'

"The thought of an autopsy being performed on poor Harriet made me feel quite ill, and I was quite sure Dr. Moss would never have agreed. And the result was everything I anticipated. Poor Rose!"

"I can imagine!" I could, too. I've lived in country communities, and I daresay before the inquest was over you wouldn't have been able to distinguish between Rose and Mrs. Dracula. In a sense you could say it was Miss Emily who saved Rose, by sticking to her story of not being certain which bottle she'd put away. Because so long as there was even the shadow of a doubt Rose was bound to get the benefit of it. And in the box she admitted she only *thought* she had put the pills away, that she could have picked up the other bottle.

"Did it come out about Miss Benyon changing her will?" I asked.

"Everything came out. They even said Rose had counted on

Dr. Moss being called in—only she hadn't known he never made calls before nine thirty in the morning or after six at night—that's what he kept a young partner for.

"Oh, I did what I could, and poor Rose needed all the help she could get. She was like her namesake before it was over—all the petals wilting and the color dying out like a sunset."

"And I suppose, after the verdict, everyone said how lucky she was—getting away with murder, I mean. Still," I went on quickly, not much liking the look in Miss Emily's eye, "her Richard stuck to her, so he must have believed in her innocence."

Miss Emily seemed suddenly to become aware of me. "Are you still there, Caroline? What was that you said? Oh, about Richard. To tell you the truth, I don't believe he'd have cared either way. An extraordinary man. And he really did love her, as well as he could love anything after his art. About that he was like a man possessed."

"But the marriage worked?" I insisted, "They were happy?"

"I suppose so. To tell you the truth, I hardly saw her again. They were married almost at once and went to live in France. Rose was very grateful—you've nothing to be

grateful for, I told her; I only said what was true. If I'd been lying to shield her, I mean, I'd have sworn they were the sleeping pills I removed.

"After she went to France it was as if a curtain came down, and she and Richard and their little girl, Jane, were all on the other side of it. I suppose that was wise—it never does to give gossips the smallest crumb."

And of course, I reflected, there'll always be those who believed you perjured yourself on Rose's account.

"Do you think she took the pills on purpose?" I said. "Miss Benyon, I mean. It seems rather drastic, even to be revenged on your own niece."

"I never allowed myself to believe that," said Miss Emily firmly. "I think she woke up later and probably wondered why I wasn't there, and then remembered about me going to London, and decided to take her own pills. If she'd had two already, she'd be pretty muzzy—it's often happened. The worst you could say against Rose was that she should have been careful to put them out of reach, but you can hardly blame her for Harriet's death. Harriet was a very forceful adult, not the sort of person who makes fatal mistakes."

"I suppose so," I said. I felt a bit let down. I like a story to

have a proper end. That's why detective stories are so satisfactory: you always know in the end who did it.

"If I was writing this as a book," I said, and now our roles were reversed, with me thinking aloud and not paying much heed to Miss Emily, "I should do what's called a switcheroo—that is, the real murderer would be someone who'd been in the picture from the start, but was so obvious that no one thought of him."

"If you're thinking of Richard," began Miss Emily, startling me because I'd half forgotten *she* was there. But I interrupted, "Oh, no, that wouldn't be popular—he was never really on the stage at all, just one of those invisible characters everyone talks about and no one sees."

"Maria?" Miss Emily sounded scornful.

"I don't think she'd be important enough for the villain in a mystery book—not unless her part was blown up a good deal. Besides, she hadn't any motive. No," I said, smiling brilliantly (at the idea of me as a successful author) "in my book you'd have done it."

There was a moment of deathly silence, long enough to make me realize what I'd said. "I'm just explaining if it was a book," I said lamely.

"But that's fascinating," approved Miss Emily. "Do go on, Caroline. I was in London, of course—"

"Oh, that's no difficulty," I assured her. "Like the days when the victim was found shot and the murderer was forty miles away and it came out that he'd fixed a gun with a bit of string round the trigger, which went off when the door was opened. I mean, you could have put the stuff, a lethal dose, in the milk before you left, knowing you were going to be late and Miss Benyon would drink it, and then in you'd come and give her the second dose of pills."

"Suppose she'd waited for me to come back before she drank the milk?" asked Miss Emily.

"You could have dropped the second dose or something. And besides, no one would think it queer that you should have washed everything up before you went to bed, because you always did."

"Dear me!" said Miss Emily, "I shall have to be careful not to offend you, shan't I? A fertile brain like that. I shall be nervous of taking anything from you in future, Caroline."

I laughed. "What good would you do me dead?" I inquired. "I only have to give in my notice—if I want to get

away, that is. There has to be a motive, and a good one."

"And you've worked one out for me to have poisoned Miss Benyon?"

"You adored Rose, and you saw that Miss Benyon meant to ruin her life. Greater love hath no man—it's no wonder you turned as white as a sheet when you heard Rose had come in, because it was never part of your plan for her to be involved. And then you saw your chance—about the medicine bottle; that was better really than telling the truth, because the jury might have thought you were trying to protect Rose."

I was so thrilled at what seemed to me the perfect logic of my argument that I hadn't even looked at Miss Emily. Now I lifted my eyes and saw the reflection of her face in the long pier glass facing the bed. And my heart nearly stopped beating. Because I'd never seen her look like that before.

I'd never seen any human face look like that, eyes wide and staring, mouth like a trap, hands balled into fists and pressed into the cheeks. Hate, I thought, that's what it is, and in the same instant I knew the reason why. It was because, groping about for a "book" explanation, I'd hit on the truth. I knew it as surely as I

know I'm born and one day shall die.

I wondered if Rose had suspected it—she must have known *she* was innocent, and there could never be proof. Speculation in plenty—but not a speck of proof. Miss Emily must have counted on that. I knew then how it was she could afford to stay at The Folly, what was in those envelopes she received every month. And I knew, too, why Rose had never come back into Miss Emily's life, even after she married Sir John.

I thought I was going to faint, and that's the cardinal sin in the profession. Die on your feet if you must, but never let the patient guess. I put my head between my knees and I think I did black out for a moment or two.

The next thing I knew Miss Emily was saying, "You'd better drink this, Caroline," and she was offering me a spot of her precious brandy. Mrs. Gates didn't approve of patients keeping spirits in their rooms, but she couldn't actually forbid it, and for once I was thankful.

Miss Emily squizzed a little soda into the glass, and after a minute or so I began to feel normal again. I got up and started to put things straight; whatever happened, she mustn't guess that I knew.

"Do stop fidgeting, Caroline," Miss Emily said. "And put those down." Those were her own sleeping pills. "I'm not Miss Benyon."

"They're neater out of the way," I said. I didn't want the situation in reverse—Miss Emily found dead in her bed from an overdose, and me being censured for not expecting what she might do after she realized she'd given herself away.

"I blame myself," she said. "I can't think what came over me. It was seeing that photograph in *Gossip*, I suppose, but how could I guess it would have that effect on you? Digging up the past is always a mistake—you may not believe this, but for months on end I never even remember it. I believe Rose was happy in her marriage—she's got her child, and Sir John never wavered in his love and faith. He's a very important man now, so Rose has a very full life.

"I don't blame her in the least for never coming to see me—I can see you were thinking that was strange—she doesn't want to resurrect the past, either. Now, my dear, go and lie down for a little; if anyone came in they'd think you were the patient. Sometimes I wonder if you've chosen the right profession, Caroline. You need a sort of armor plating in your job."

Too right, I told myself, and first thing in the morning I'll tell Mrs. Gates I want to be taken off the case. I'll give in my notice—she won't mind if she can get someone else. I mean, you allow for a fair amount of disadvantages in any job—but you certainly don't reckon on waiting hand and foot on a murderer.

So here I am, finishing my report, and then I'll slip down and post it to myself—to Miss C. Flynn, Post Restante, Charing Cross. That way it'll be safe. And presently I'll start mapping out a campaign. I wonder if it's my duty to tell Sir John what I know. He might be glad to have his faith in his wife vindicated. That's something I'll have to think about when I'm up in town.

It was Nurse Horrocks on day duty who found Caroline the next morning. By that time she must have been dead for some hours. Cause of death—an overdose of sleeping pills.

From the beginning there was no doubt in the official mind that this was suicide. The only person who could have told them differently was the late Nurse Flynn's patient, Emily Brown, but all she said was, "What a dreadful thing! I wonder if I could have prevented it."

Mrs. Gates was furious—this kind of thing would do her sort of establishment immeasurable harm. So she snapped at Miss Brown. "Why should you suppose you could have prevented it?"

"Well," said Emily, spreading her hedgehog's paws on the sheet, "there was this guilt complex she had—oh, she never went into details, but it was something about some old woman she'd been nursing who'd taken an overdose of sleeping pills—a very remarkable coincidence, wouldn't you say? Or would a psychologist call it something else?"

"There's nothing to that effect on her record," snapped Mrs. Gates.

"Oh, I don't think anyone blamed her except herself. But she had the idea that if only she'd put the bottle out of reach the old woman wouldn't have died. But, of course, it's so easy to be wise after the event. Don't brood over the past, I used to tell her, all the past things are past and over, the deeds are done and the tears are shed."

"But why last night?" insisted Mrs. Gates. "She had no letters, no telephone calls."

"We were discussing a rather similar case—something she saw in a newspaper—and it started her off. Mind you, I can't

supply any details, or even dates—I gather it was a long time ago; but it seemed to bring everything back. I really thought she was going off, so I offered her a drop of brandy—”

“Hot sweet tea is the acknowledged treatment for shock,” Mrs. Gates informed her. “I’d have expected you to know that, Miss Brown.”

“Ah, but where was I going to get hot sweet tea on the spur of the moment? Anyway, it was only a tablespoonful and then I told her to go and lie down. She really did look queer, Mrs. Gates.”

“Well?”

“Do you think—could they have been *my* sleeping pills she used?”

“I suppose so, unless you know exactly how many you should have. In any case, as a resident nurse, she’d have access to the key of the poison cupboard, and could have helped herself.”

One of the guests contributed that she’d seen Caroline Flynn creep out and post a letter the previous night, so that started fresh speculation. To the coroner? Suicides usually left a note behind. If not to the coroner, to some friend or relative? But if so, no one came forward, though the inquest was delayed to give any of them an opportunity.

“She was like me,” said Miss Brown sadly. “A loner. I knew it from the start. I felt there might be an affinity . . .”

A mother, a Mrs. Vickers living up north, was eventually traced, and she reluctantly acknowledged that she and her daughter had been estranged for years. But she made the funeral arrangements and The Folly sent a wreath and Miss Brown sent another on her own.

“The least I can do,” she said.

Miss Brown’s new special was a sensible bouncing woman of 40, who discouraged what she called “morbid talk.”

“You’ve had a shock, so the best thing you can do is not to think about it,” she said. “And don’t blame yourself. If people mean to take their own lives no one can stop them. Now why not take a little nap?”

“If you say so, nurse,” said Miss Brown meekly.

She crossed her hands and closed her eyes. It had all passed off without a hitch. What a masterpiece that casual mention of the brandy, letting everyone assume that Caroline had taken it herself. It was surprising how easy murder could be if you didn’t try to embroider or explain too much.

Miss Benyon and her hot milk 20 years ago.

And now Caroline Flynn and the brandy.

And no sense feeling any guilt for either of them. Harriet would have wrecked Rose's life, and she, Emily, had given it back to her. No need to feel squeamish about accepting a little income in return. You can't go on working forever. And Caroline—stupid girl—couldn't prevent herself from blurting out her suspicions; you could say she signed her own death warrant, and it wasn't as if there was any future, in the true meaning of the word, for a girl like that. As for the letter—that was probably in answer to an advertisement for

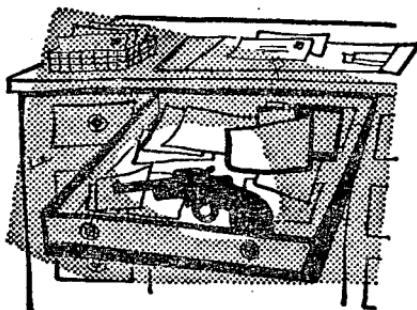
another job; no need to give that a second thought.

Miss Brown slept peacefully.

And a good thing, too. Because the time is coming when sleep won't be easy for Miss Brown—not easy at all.

For what Miss Brown doesn't yet appreciate is that even official patience isn't inexhaustible, and one day in the not too distant future someone's going to realize that a letter addressed to Miss C. Flynn isn't going to be called for, and Miss Flynn's "suicide" is going to be remembered, and the letter is going to be opened.

And then the cat will be among the pigeons.



Lawrence Treat

R As in Robbery

A bookbindery, miniature books of the 16th and 17th Centuries, a banker who burbles, a strange robbery, a not so strange robbery, an old gun, an old army blanket, an old station wagon, a first edition of Charles Dickens, a beautiful woman with bright red lips, a rosebush thorn—put them all together and you have a mosaic of murder. The pieces were carefully collected, carefully fitted to each other, by the Homicide Squad and the Technical Laboratory, in this fine example of modern police work by Mr. American Police Procedural himself . . .

Detectives: HOMICIDE SQUAD and LAB

The main facts were easy enough to get. Name: Nicholas Yates. Age: about 45. Occupation: bookbinder and manuscript restorer. Married, no children. Cause of death: bullet wound.

Jub Freeman, director of the laboratory, appreciated the fact that the body hadn't been found until after 11:00 A.M. It gave him time to read his morning mail, run a couple of alcohol tests through the gas chromatograph, and make out his reports. He did the tasks cheerfully, for he was a cheerful guy and he looked it, with bright eyes, round, shiny

cheeks, and a quick grin that dimpled him up like an adolescent.

When the call came, Jub picked up his bag with the portable equipment and drove out with Lieutenant Decker, Chief of Homicide. The rest of the gang came in from their various assignments.

The house was in an isolated, wooded section in the northern reaches of the city. Yates's shop, a converted garage, faced the house, and Fred Briscoe, who worked for Yates and had discovered the body, was waiting on the lawn when the police arrived.

Briscoe was young and dreamy-eyed, with loose limbs and a sensitive face under a shock of yellowish brown hair that looked as if it would tear a comb apart.

"I'm sort of shook up," he said. "Mr. Yates was more than just a boss to me. He took me in when I was a kid and taught me the trade."

"You got here early?" Decker asked.

"No, late. The shop—right now Nick has only two other assistants—the shop works Saturdays and we take Monday mornings off, but I don't put in regular hours."

Lieutenant Decker, tall, gray-haired, brisk, fired his questions, and Briscoe answered them straightforwardly. Yes, he had a key to the place. He had a room nearby and he'd come in a half hour ago and found Yates dead, in the shop. No, Briscoe hadn't touched anything. Mrs. Yates? Away for the weekend—she had gone to a wedding, but Yates stayed here to work; besides, he hated weddings. Yes, that was Yates's car over there, the black, beat-up station wagon. Mrs. Yates had her own car. The other employees? A couple of girls. They'd be along sometime after lunch. Sure, Briscoe would stick around. Mrs. Yates was due back, and she might need him.

Decker nodded, dismissed him, and went into the garage. Jub followed, carrying his bag.

The place told Jub a lot, and at the same time told him nothing. The guillotine—a big paper-cutter with a four-foot blade-dominated the room and was surrounded by discarded slices of paper, most of which had fallen to the floor. The nearest worktable had scraps of leather and paste pots and a lithograph stone on which the binding leather was pared. Beyond, in the tooling area, Jub noticed strips of gold leaf near the stamping machine. The files and gouges and designing tools were ranged along the wall. For the rest, presses and book-frames and vises, all in use, told the story of a small but thriving business.

Jub blinked, and concentrated on the job that had brought him here. The body of a small frail man lay on its back, near the entrance. There was no blood and no sign of disturbance other than the confusion of half-done work. Jub and Decker bent down and studied the corpse. They both noticed the blade of grass and bits of leaf wedged between the rubber heel and the sole of one of Yates's shoes.

"I'll bet you two bits to a dime that the heels are scuffed," Decker said..

"No take," Jub said. "Anybody can tell he was dragged in here and placed down too carefully, and that it happened at least twenty-four hours ago."

"Before the rain," Decker said wryly. "That Sunday morning shower must have washed out any marks that were outside."

"Sure," Jub said, unperturbed. "Usually happens, doesn't it?"

They both stood up as the door opened and Inspector Mitch Taylor stuck his head inside. "Boss," he said to Decker, "somebody broke into the house and did a job. Better take a look."

Decker nodded and went out, but Jub stayed. His work was to collect the physical evidence, dust for prints, and chalk-mark whatever he wanted to have photographed. He sighed and bent down to open his bag. He was hidden by the table and squatting next to it when he heard someone enter the room cautiously and close the door.

"Want something?" he asked.

Fred Briscoe gave a start, and the bulge of his Adam's apple pumped up and down. "Didn't know anybody was here," he said. "I wanted to see if anything was taken. We have some pretty valuable stuff, first

editions and so on, but right now we were working 'on something special. The Trumbull Collection."

"What's special about it?" Jub asked.

"Miniature books, from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, worth thousands. There's a Bible the size of a postage stamp—the binding's embossed in silver and every word is in there, but you need a magnifying glass to read it. Then there's a Medici copy of the *Inferno*, this big." With his thumb and forefinger Briscoe indicated the size.

"Who's Trumbull?" Jub asked.

"Thomas Trumbull, banker. You never heard of him?"

Jub disregarded the question. "Where are these miniatures?" he asked.

"That's what I came to see," Briscoe said, and started forward.

Jub held up his hand. "I'll do the looking," he said. "Just tell me where."

"There's a steel box in that cabinet on the right, near those glue pots. That's where Nick kept the Collection."

Jub crossed the room and opened the cabinet. The steel box was lying on a shelf and he lifted the catch gingerly, touching only the edge and being careful neither to deposit nor

destroy any fingerprints. The box was unlocked, and he raised the lid and then dropped it with a bang.

"Empty," he said.

Briscoe let out a long low whistle. "Geez!" he said. "Maybe that's what he was killed for."

Maybe, Jub thought, and with Briscoe following him, he went out to give Decker the news. He met Decker coming from the house, but the Lieutenant was on fire with his own angle.

"Somebody slit a screen, busted a windowpane, and broke in, and whoever it was, he left his signature. Pulled all the shades down, dumped drawers, dropped cigar ashes, and stayed downstairs. We might get something from the M.O. file out of that. I'm calling in now."

"Any sign of Yates having been killed in the house?" Jub asked.

"Nothing I noticed, but I'll sure want a second look."

"You'll want some second thoughts, too," Jub said, "because you've got a robbery." And he told Decker about the missing miniature books.

The Lieutenant grimaced. "Brother!" he exclaimed. "Just when I thought this was going to be simple."

"Looks simple to me," Jub said. "How many people would steal a collection of miniature books? And where would you sell them?"

"I wouldn't sell them," Decker remarked. "I'd keep them. And that's the whole damn trouble."

For the rest of the day information poured in, and suspects and witnesses were questioned. Jub did his homework in the lab--on the bullet, on Yates's clothing, on the bits of evidence he'd collected in the house and in the shop. The jacket, a gray, herringbone weave, had a small rip just below one elbow.

Most of the fingerprints that Jub examined turned out to be the ones he expected--Yates's, Mrs. Yates's, Briscoe's, Yates's assistants'. Nothing suspicious. But to Jub's surprise the only prints on the steel box belonged to Nicholas Yates. Apparently he'd been the last person to handle it.

Meanwhile, Thomas Trumbull took his loss philosophically enough, and why not? He was insured for \$35,000. Mrs. Yates returned from her trip, got over the shock of murder and robbery, and reported that nothing of value had been taken from the house. She could account for every minute of her time—at least, she said she

could. She offered the information that her husband had owned a gun, but she hadn't seen it in years and didn't remember where he'd kept it. Fred Briscoe confirmed the existence of the gun but was equally vague about its whereabouts. He devoted himself to consoling Mrs. Yates, and seemed to enjoy doing it.

The Modus Operandi File dug up five names of known robbers who specialized in B & E (Breaking and Entering) and who fitted the pattern of the marauder in the main house. The Homicide Squad was busy tracking them down; they located the first four and checked them off the same day. The fifth man, Frank Nolte, apparently had disappeared on Sunday, and Decker put Nolte's name on the teletype and sent out a five-state flyer, with pictures.

Jub, concentrating on Yates's clothing, found a number of brownish woollen fibers. He guessed that they might have come from an army blanket and he phoned Mrs. Yates to verify his suspicion.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Nicholas had one that he kept in his car. He wrapped up all sorts of things in it. I can't find it, which is just as well. It was always filthy." From the tone of her voice Jub gathered that

she thought Nicholas had been filthy, too. Jub thanked her and hung up. But now he had a secret.

The secret was the thorn. He had dug it out of the seat of Nicholas Yates's pants, studied it under a microscope, and sent it for identification to the Botany Department of the local university. The identification came at noon on Tuesday. *Rosa damascena*, and apparently from a large bush. A small boy could have told him that much in plain English—rosebush.

Jub went downstairs with his information, to consult Decker. The Lieutenant was in the anteroom just outside his office and was ushering out a suave, heavily built man with a gray mustache. The man wore a dark suit and had a pink-and-yellow rose in his lapel. He looked like a banker, and he was.

"Mr. Trumbull—Sergeant Freeman," Decker said, introducing them. Then, to Jub, "Mr. Trumbull just gave us a list of the people who might be interested in acquiring the miniature books. Friends of his, mostly."

Trumbull burbled, "Not friends. Acquaintances. But my guess is that the Collection will be sent to Europe and sold there. I told the insurance company to watch all transatlantic planes."

"When did you notify them about the loss?" the Lieutenant asked.

Trumbull hesitated, but when he spoke, his voice was defiant. "Sunday," he said.

"That was before the body was discovered," Decker said gently.

"That's right. Yates phoned me Saturday night to tell me about the theft. Said he was going to inform the police."

"He didn't," Decker said. "He was killed first."

"Well, find out who killed him."

"That's what we're working at," Decker said.

Trumbull burbled again. It was a trick he'd practised often, and he used it with effect. "Then do it," he said, "without bothering me."

Jub broke up the battle with what seemed the most innocent of remarks. "That's a nice rose you're wearing, Mr. Trumbull," he said casually. "Unusual tints."

"My hobby," Trumbull said. "I grow eighty-four varieties."

"I'd like to drop by and look them over sometime," Jub remarked. "I'm interested in roses."

Trumbull grunted as if he thought the police should pay more attention to crime and less to roses. Decker teetered forward as if he was going to

snatch Trumbull's boutonniere, but Trumbull wheeled and marched off. Decker brushed his lapel in mock vanity.

"Come in and tell me about this sudden interest of yours in roses," Decker said to Jub.

Jub followed the Lieutenant into his tiny cubicle of an office. The chair Trumbull had sat in was empty, but the other two were piled with papers. The small stuffed crocodile glared balefully from a bookshelf, and Jub sat down on the window sill and told Decker about the thorn.

"Judging by where it was stuck," he said, "Yates could not have sat down. Not comfortably, anyhow. Therefore he probably acquired that thorn while being dragged. And he was dragged headfirst, according to the angle at which the point went in. Notice any rosebushes at the Yates place?"

Decker shook his head. "Couldn't say. I've been more interested in a guy named Frank Nolte, who is apparently on the lam. If form means anything, he'll show up in a couple of months and won't be able to remember what he did on a particular Sunday so long ago. He'll claim the police are picking on him. Whatever evidence we have will be stale by that time, and the D.A. will tell us to forget it, we have no

case. Besides, Nolte's a pro; he wouldn't kill if he could help it, and why would he haul a body from the house all the way over to the shop? And he wouldn't go for miniature books, or for that matter, for any books. The guy's not the literary type."

"Ever think we might have two separate crimes here?" Jub asked.

"I've thought of it, but I hate to base a case on coincidence. Seems more logical to me that the B & E in the house was some kind of a blind to take attention away from the robbery in the shop."

"But why was the body moved?" Jub said.

"Ask Yates," Decker said sourly. "He knows."

"What about Briscoe?" Jub said. "Got anything on him?"

"I think he was playing around with Mrs. Yates, who's an attractive wench, but what of it? You don't kill a man because you're in love with his wife, and Briscoe wasn't really in love with her or with anybody else. He was in love with himself, and still is."

"Well," Jub said, "I want to find a rosebush with bent or broken branches and with a few shreds of gray herringbone caught on it. And I know where to start looking."

"Take Taylor and Small with you," Decker said. He made a

note on the torn flap of an envelope. Then his phone rang and he picked it up. "Decker, Homicide," he said. His eyes lit up and he said into the phone, "Right. Send him in." He plunked the receiver down and said crisply to Jub, "Nolte. Here."

Frank Nolte, a big slow ox of a man, came in a minute later, with a small sad little guy with tiny eyes. Nolte introduced the small sad man as his lawyer.

"I hear it around that you want to see me," Nolte said. "I got nothing to hide, but this Yates got knocked off and the papers say I'm hot. I like to cooperate." He fought through all four syllables of the last word, but only with minor success. "So I come in."

"You broke into the Yates house Saturday night," Decker said. "What time?"

"It wasn't no break," Nolte said in an injured tone. "I was invited."

"He wasn't even a trespasser," the sad little lawyer said. "Tell him, Frank."

"Yates paid me," Nolte said. "Five C's. He told me to cut the screen and bust a window. He gave me permission, see? I was his guest. He says I should go in and dump the drawers and take what I want, which I didn't do on account there was nothing

worth grabbing, except maybe a few trading stamps."

"Why," Decker said, "all this hocus-pocus?"

"That's it," Nolte said. "Hoax. Hoax is pokes. Yates said he wanted to play a joke on his wife, see? She was away, and he wants her to come back and think the joint got cleaned out. Teach her a lesson for going off and leaving him alone."

"And that," the little lawyer said, "is the whole story. Frank did him a favor, and if you got any questions don't ask them. Because...on my advice he doesn't have to answer and he won't."

Decker stared in disbelief. "Brother!" he said. "The time has come. Oh, wonder of wonders! The only improvement you could add would be a tape recording of your conversation with Yates. Or have you got that on you, too?"

"Don't answer him," the little lawyer said. And Nolte didn't.

After the pair had left, Decker said to Jub, "You know, up to a point I believe the guy. Remember that Yates was the last one to touch the box with the miniature books, so suppose he stole them himself, and sold them. Then, to cover himself, he faked a robbery and set Nolte up as the

fall guy. If Yates had lived, he'd probably have planted some loot on Nolte, and Yates would have been in a tough spot. Nolte's word against his, and who'd believe a whopper like the one Nolte just handed out? Not me, anyhow."

"Kind of a mess, isn't it?" Jub said cheerfully.

"I don't think so," the Lieutenant said. "If we're right, if Yates did set up a fake robbery, then we can forget all about Nolte."

"Glad to," Jub said.

"Okay, now let's try to follow Yates's actions. Trumbull says Yates phoned him Saturday night with news of the theft. Maybe so, but maybe Yates went there, instead. And Trumbull's nobody's fool; he'd ask how anybody could have known Yates had the miniature books unless Yates himself told them. So Trumbull would figure out he was being tricked, and he'd get mad and accuse Yates, and maybe they had a fight and Trumbull killed him. And then moved the body. Who else would want to move it?"

"I don't know," Jub said, "and won't until the facts are in."

Decker picked up a scrap of paper, crumpled it and flipped it at the crocodile. He missed. "Sure, all we have to do is locate the gun and the blanket."

"And the rosebush," Jub added. "I think I'll go have a look now."

He found it late that afternoon, with the help of Mitch Taylor and Charlie Small. It was in a flower-bed near the entrance to the Trumbull estate. Rain had washed away most of the evidence that must have been there on Saturday, but it was apparent where some rosebushes had been trampled and the body dragged, and a shred of herringbone was still caught on a thorn. As a result, Decker had a session with Trumbull the next morning.

"The guy knows his onions," the Lieutenant told Jub afterward. "He told me not to bother him until we had some real evidence. If Yates came to the Trumbull place, he says, Yates never even went inside. Trumbull claims he was home reading." Decker winced. "They usually say they were watching TV, but Trumbull's literary."

"What about the money?" Jub said. "If Yates stole the miniatures, he probably sold them and got paid plenty, and probably in cash. So where is it? Who has it?"

Decker said complacently, "If I was a banker, that would be no problem. I'd put it in the bank, and nobody would be able to trace it."

"What are you driving at?" Jub asked.

"I have a feeling that I'm missing out somewhere. Here's the problem, Jub. If Trumbull did it, we have a weak motive but everything else scans. If Briscoe did it, we have a strong motive—he'd practically inherit the business, he'd get his hands on a nice hunk of cash, and maybe on Mrs. Yates, too. But with Briscoe living so near Yates, Briscoe would never bring the body back to his own doorstep."

"He might have, if he had to bring the car back anyhow. Maybe he wanted to frame Nolte instead of Trumbull."

"Then he's an idiot," Decker said. "And why would he want to bring the car back? Why, Jub?"

Jub didn't answer, and absent-mindedly Decker crumpled up another scrap of paper, rolled it into a ball, and aimed it at the jaws of the crocodile. As usual, he missed. "Jub," he said, "let's me and you go back to the shop. I want to rummage."

When they entered the bindery, it was the picture of peace and contentment. The two girls whom Yates employed had been checked out carefully and were in the clear. One of them was pasting down end papers in a green leather

volume, the other was sewing some book signatures together. Their smocked figures seemed almost part of the shop. Briscoe, humming to himself, was bent over a manuscript. He was piecing fragments of it on a silk base that was almost transparent.

He glanced up briefly. "With you in a few minutes," he muttered. "Can't leave this now, not in this state."

Decker approached Briscoe and peered over his shoulder. Jub, lingering in the doorway, heard a car approach and turned around to see the Yates station wagon drive up. An attractive woman with dark hair and bright red lips was at the wheel. Jub swung around and went over to her.

"Mrs. Yates?" he said. She nodded casually, disinterestedly, until he identified himself. "I'm Sergeant Freeman, Technical Laboratory," he said.

She gave a start. "Oh!" she exclaimed. Her black eyes were worried and searching, her red mouth was tight.

Jub smiled. "I thought you had your own car," he said.

Her gravity increased, as if some part of her had to be gathered together in defense. She spoke slowly, choosing her words with care. "I have," she said, "but it's being repaired, so I used this one. I often do."

"I'd like to examine it later on," Jub said. "Didn't have time the other day." She was still watching him, almost transfixed, and he said, "Something you want to tell me?"

"No, nothing." Her grip tightened on the wheel. "Nothing at all."

"Well, a couple of things I'd like to find out," Jub said. "Mind if I sit down?" And he circled the car, opened the door, and took the seat next to her. He bounced up with a yelp, and felt the seat of his pants. "Wow!" he said, pulling a thorn and holding it up. "How did that get there?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "I should have brushed off the seat. I put some rosebushes on it the other day."

"Where did you get them?" Jub asked.

"From Mr. Trumbull. He grows them, and we got to know each other the afternoon he came here with his miniature books. He offered me some bushes, and I picked them up Saturday morning."

"What did you do with them?"

"I brought them to my niece. She has a new house and she needed some shrubs, so I gave her the bushes."

She smiled finally, and Jub said gently, "Want to tell me now what's bothering you?"

"It's nothing, and I'm not even sure. But I think I remember where Nicholas used to keep his gun."

"Yes?"

"In the storeroom behind the shop." She took a quick breath and seemed to force herself to continue. "An old filing cabinet. There's a humidor inside it. Nicholas used to smoke cigars but I made him stop. I think he kept the gun in the humidor." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "But I'm not sure—not really."

She was sure. Jub was convinced of it, but she was afraid that admitting certainty would point suspicion to herself.

Jub swung the door open. "The Lieutenant's here," he said. "He'll want to talk to you later on."

She nodded, then glanced down and gasped. "Oh—just look at my stocking!" she exclaimed. "It's ruined!"

Jub followed her glance and saw that her ankle was slim and shapely, and that her stocking had a broad oval stain of oil across the toe, where the open-work of her shoe exposed it.

"Leak?" he said.

She nodded. "From the speedometer cable. It started two or three days ago, and Nicholas promised to have it

fixed. I never could rely on him to get anything done."

Jub slipped his finger under the dashboard to confirm her diagnosis. Then, without comment, he took the keys from the ignition and dropped them in his pocket. "Thanks," he said pleasantly, and he stepped out.

Nothing had changed inside the shop. Briscoe was still intent on his manuscript job and the two girls were doing their best to pretend that Lieutenant Decker wasn't there. Jub signaled him to follow him into the storeroom in back. There, with one eye on the old-fashioned, wooden filing cabinet, Jub whispered what Mrs. Yates had just told him. Then he opened the top drawer of the filing cabinet.

Inside were a pair of old rubbers and a humidor. The wood, highly polished, had streaks of dust near the edges. The rest of the surface had obviously been wiped clean.

"No fingerprints, you can bet on it," Jub remarked, and opened the box.

The gun, an old H & R with a short barrel, was the right caliber—a .22. Jub picked it up, hefted it, then broke it open. The hinge pins were stiff and there were six cartridges in the cylinder. One of them was shiny and new, the other five were dull and corroded.

"I guess that's it," Jub said, and handed it to the Lieutenant. "Fired once, and the used cartridge replaced."

Decker examined the revolver. "It's a wonder the damn thing didn't explode in his face," he said. "Or misfire. A hell of a way to keep a gun." He stuck it in his pocket and said, "I'll slap this at him right now. You follow up fast, while he's off-balance."

"Follow up with what?"

"Anything," Decker said. "Just fuss around and keep needling him."

When they returned to the workroom, Mrs. Yates was standing next to Briscoe and talking to him, but she broke off and gave Jub a look of inquiry. He gave no sign that he noticed.

Briscoe swung around and slid off his stool. "Got that thing done," he said with satisfaction. "It's the original record of the land purchase from the Indians, when this town was founded. The city museum people had it stuck away somewhere practically falling apart. What a job! Like to look at it?"

"Later on," Decker said. "We just found the gun. The one that killed Yates."

"No kidding!" Briscoe said. "Where?"

"You tell me," Decker said.

"Tell you what?"

"How much did Yates get for the collection of miniature books?" Decker asked.

Briscoe smiled. "I didn't know he got anything."

Decker made a sudden swoop, grabbed Briscoe by the wrists, and held up his hands. "Your fingers are kind of scratched up, aren't they?" Decker said.

"No more than usual, in this kind of work," Briscoe answered.

Jub only half listened. The Lieutenant was stalling, feeling his way. The gun, the blanket, the money. Well, they had the gun, they knew a good deal about the blanket, but the money was still missing. Jub thought of what the Lieutenant had said earlier in the day: "When a banker wants to hide money, he puts it in a bank." Well, when a bookbinder wants to hide something, where would he put it? In a book. He doesn't hide it in his closet or in an old sock. He puts it in a book.

There were plenty of books here, but how do you hide a thick bundle of money? A few bills in each volume? Hardly. You don't want to run the risk of somebody accidentally finding one of the books. So you lock them up. Or else—

He glanced at the books locked up in the various presses.

Some glue had been squeezed out of the pages of a red volume held in the cheeks of a wooden screw-press near him, and he wondered why anybody would glue the pages of a book together. He stepped over and started to loosen the screws. Briscoe leaped at him.

"Don't—that's a Dickens first edition—you'll spoil it—a week's work—it has to stay like that—for the glue to set!"

Decker grabbed Briscoe's arm and spun him around before he could reach Jub. Briscoe stiffened, grabbed the edge of the table, and stared tensely. Jub kept untwisting the thick wooden screws that held the press. When they were loose, he bent down, removed the shiny red leather volume carefully, and examined it.

He'd seen book-boxes like this before. They were sold as cigarette boxes. The pages were first glued together and then the inside was gouged out to form a compartment, with the cover for a lid. Jub, using his thumb, tipped up the lid. The box was empty.

Briscoe let out a burst of nervous laughter. "Well?" he snapped.

Decker turned to Jub. "Any prints?" Decker asked.

Jub nodded. They were there all right. He'd worked on the fingerprints of everybody

concerned in the case, and the general characteristics that he'd been studying those long hours yesterday were still fixed in his mind. He squinted and angled his head until the light struck at the proper angle to show him the pattern. Then he stood up.

"Mrs. Yates's," Jub said.

She reacted like a taut spring let loose. "It's my money!" she shrieked. "Nicholas got it and so it's mine. Fred stole it, he had no right to it, he killed Nicholas and took the money and hid it there and so I took it. I had a *right* to it, didn't I?"

"How did you know where the money was?" Decker asked.

"Nicholas had been working on a Dickens first edition and he *did* have it in that press, so I looked through the shop on Monday night and instead of the Dickens, that red leather volume was there, with the money in it. And I knew Fred was the last person to use the station wagon—I knew from the way it was parked. The brake was off and the gears were left in first, with the wheels turned away from the curb. Fred always parks that way—so it had to be him."

"You should have been a detective," Decker said wryly. "But instead, you're an accomplice after the fact."

"What fact?" Briscoe asked quietly. "You don't believe the

lies she just told you, do you? You can't be that naive. Besides, I haven't been in that car for a week."

"You had access to the gun," Decker said.

"So did she," Briscoe said. "And if I'd killed anyone at Trumbull's, do you think I'd be fool enough to move the body? I'd have left it there with the car, and walked home. Why would *I* have moved the body?"

"Why would *I*?" Mrs. Yates asked, her eyes flashing.

It was a fair question, and although later the Commissioner ordered Briscoe and Mrs. Yates held as material witnesses, there was no proof as to which of them had killed Nicholas Yates. Mrs. Yates insisted Briscoe did it, and he said she did.

Balenky and Bankhart tackled her alibi and found out that on the night of the murder she'd slept at a motel only thirty miles away and could easily have slipped out unnoticed. But had she?

Decker questioned her and questioned Briscoe all that day and most of the next, but with no results. Trumbull left town—on important business, he claimed. Jub vacuum-cleaned the Yates station wagon in the forlorn hope of picking up a miracle. He didn't. Charlie Small fine-combed the murder

site, scraped up soil samples, and brought them to the lab. He could have saved himself the trouble.

A work gang dug in back yards, and sifted rubbish heaps on the chance of finding the army blanket. They found the wrong one and went back to their drudgery. Mitch Taylor collected clothes from Briscoe's room and from Mrs. Yates's closet and dumped the collection on the lab floor.

"What the hell do you want me to do with all that?" Jub asked in amazement.

Mitch shrugged. "The Lieutenant didn't say. He just said to cart the stuff up here." Mitch held up his thumb and sucked it. "Damn thorn pricked me," he said.

Jub stared. "Thorn?" he said in a low voice. "From what?"

"From that thing," Mitch said, and kicked a torn sneaker free of the pile. "Don't know why I bothered with all this. Just junk."

Jub let out a yell. "Junk?" he said. "Maybe!"

A couple of hours later, after a short phone conference with Decker in which Jub summarized his findings, Jub came downstairs. He was carrying a pair of worn-out sneakers, several gas chromatograph charts, and a notebook. He walked into Decker's office.

Fred Briscoe was there, and Decker was still getting nowhere. The Lieutenant looked up at Jub and said with feigned innocence, "Want something?"

Jub tossed the sneakers on Decker's desk. "There's your proof," Jub said. "Whoever wore those drove Yates's car and trampled down Trumbull's rosebushes."

"Not me," Briscoe said firmly.

Jub faced him aggressively. "Do you still state that you hadn't driven Yates's car for a week?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Briscoe demanded.

"Oil," Jub said. "There's a leak under the dashboard, and oil drips down and onto the shoe of whoever is driving. You can barely see it on this, but it's there all right."

"Lots of people get oil on their shoes," Briscoe said.

"This is a very special oil," Jub said, "with distinctive characteristics. I analyzed a drop of it, and then a smear from the sneaker. The chromatograms match. See?" He held up a pair of charts showing zigzag lines with similar peaks and troughs.

"That proves something?" Briscoe sneered.

"Plenty. And the sneakers are full of thorns that had worked through the canvas.

That's why you couldn't walk. Your feet hurt, and you *had* to drive back."

"Those sneakers?" Briscoe said. "They look like the pair that I gave to Mrs. Yates once. For garden work."

"They were in your closet."

For the first time Briscoe looked worried, and Jub sensed that it was touch and go whether Briscoe would break or survive his crisis and send the Homicide Squad back to work. Finding more evidence. Piling up more details. Methodically digging, questioning, investigating, analyzing.

Then the phone rang and the Lieutenant picked it up. "Decker, Homicide," he said. He said crisply, "Yes... Good." When he hung up, his expression was grim, fixed, but with no hint of triumph.

"They just found the blanket," he said to Briscoe. "You buried it in the woods behind the Yates house. The blanket is bloody, full of thorns, and has a stained cotton jacket wrapped up in it. We'll prove the jacket's yours—yours and only yours."

Briscoe gave a gasp, leaned forward, and buried his head in his hands. "All right," he sobbed. "I did it. Now let me alone. Go away and leave me alone."

"Tell us about it first," Decker said.

"I came to the shop Saturday night intending to work on that land-purchase manuscript, but I saw Yates and another man inside. They were looking at the miniature books, and this man took them and put them in a suitcase. Then he handed Yates a roll of bills and left. I waited outside and heard Yates phone Trumbull and tell him there'd been a robbery. From what Yates said, Trumbull must have been suspicious and wanted to see Yates right away."

"So Trumbull told the truth," Decker murmured.

"Then I went into the shop and pretended I didn't know what Yates had done. He told me there'd been a robbery and he was going up to Trumbull's, I asked if I could come along, and Yates said sure. While he

was getting the car, I took the gun from the humidor in the filing cabinet.

"The whole idea came to me in a flash—how I could kill Yates up at Trumbull's. I could leave the car there, then walk back, replace the gun, and hide the money—and who would ever suspect me? Trumbull would be the goat. And it would have worked, too, except for those damn thorns. It was agony to walk—I just couldn't! If it hadn't been for those damn—"

He made a lunge for the sneakers, as if he wanted to tear them apart. Decker yanked them out of reach, and Briscoe banged into the desk.

Decker dropped the sneakers as if they were red-hot. "Ouch!" he said. "Those thorns!"



James M. Cain

Dead Man

This tough-textured crime story—about the murder of a railroad detective by a hobo—is a curious blend of the realistic and the romantic. It was written nearly 40 years ago by the author of THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE and DOUBLE INDEMNITY. More than a generation ago—but there is no generation gap. Except for a few references to the 1930's, "Dead Man" might have been written last week . . .

He felt the train check, knew what it meant. In a moment, from up toward the engine, came the chant of the railroad detective: "Rise and shine, boys, rise and shine." The hoboes began dropping off. He could hear them out there in the dark, cursing as the train went by. That was what they always did on these freights: let the hoboes climb on in the yards, making no effort to dislodge them there; for that would have meant a foolish game of hide-and-seek between two or three detectives and two or three hundred hoboes, with the hoboes swarming on as fast as the detectives put them off. What they did was let the hoboes alone until the train was several miles under way; then they pulled down to a speed slow enough for men to drop

off, but too fast for them to climb back on. Then the detective went down the line, brushing them off, like caterpillars from a twig. In two minutes they would all be ditched, a crowd of bitter men in a lonely spot; but they always cursed, always seemed surprised.

He crouched in the coal gondola and waited. He hadn't boarded a flat or a refrigerator with the others, back in the Los Angeles yards, tempting though this comfort was. He wasn't long on the road, and he still didn't like to mix with the other hoboes, admit he was one of them. Also, he couldn't shake off a notion that he was sharper than they were, that playing a lone hand he might think of some magnificent trick that would defeat the detective,

and thus, even at this ignoble trade, give him a sense of accomplishment, of being good at it. He had slipped into the gond not in spite of its harshness, but because of it; it was black, and would give him a chance to hide, and the detective, not expecting him there, might pass him by. He was 19 years old, and was proud of the nickname they had given him in the poolroom back home. They called him Lucky.

"Rise and shine, boys, rise and shine."

Three dropped off the tank car ahead, and the detective climbed into the gond. The flashlight shot around, and Lucky held his breath. He had curled into one of the three chutes for unloading coal. The trick worked. These chutes were dangerous, for if you stepped into one and the bottom dropped, it would dump you under the train. The detective took no chances. He first shot the flash, then held onto the side while he climbed over the chutes. When he came to the last one, where Lucky lay, he shot the flash, but carelessly, and not squarely into the hole, so that he saw nothing. Stepping over, he went on, climbed to the boxcar behind, and resumed his chant; there were more curses, more

feet sliding on ballast on the railroadbed outside. Soon the train picked up speed. That meant the detective had reached the caboose, that all the hoboies were cleared.

Lucky stood up, looked around. There was nothing to see, except hotdog stands along the highway, but it was pleasant to poke your head up, let the wind whip your hair, and reflect how you had outwitted the detective. When the click of the rails slowed and station lights showed ahead, he squatted down again, dropped his feet into the chute. As soon as lights flashed alongside he braced against the opposite side of the chute: that was one thing he had learned, the crazy way they shot the brakes on these freights. When the train jerked to a shrieking stop, he was ready, and didn't get slammed. The bell tolled, the engine pulled away, there was an interval of silence. That meant they had cut the train and would be picking up more cars. Soon they would be going on.

"Ah, ha! Hiding out on me, hey?"

The flashlight shot down from the boxcar. Lucky jumped, seized the side of the gond, scrambled up, vaulted. When he hit the roadbed, his ankles stung from the impact and he staggered for footing. The

detective was on him, grappling. He broke away, ran down the track, past the caboose, into the dark. The detective followed, but he was a big man and began to lose ground. Lucky was clear, when all of a sudden his foot drove against a switch bar and he went flat on his face, panting from the hysteria of shock.

The detective didn't grapple this time. He let go with a barrage of kicks.

"Hide out on me, will you? Treat you right, give you a break, and you hide out on me. I'll learn you—"

Lucky tried to get up, couldn't. He was jerked to his feet, rushed up the track on the run. He pulled back, but couldn't get set. He sat down, dug in with his sliding heels. The detective kicked and jerked, in fury. Lucky clawed for something to hold onto, his hand caught the rail. The detective stamped on it. He pulled it back in pain, clawed again.

This time his fingers closed on a spike, sticking an inch or two out of the tie. The detective jerked, the spike pulled out of the hole, and Lucky resumed his unwilling run.

"Lemme go! Why don't you lemme go?"

"Come on! Hide out on me,

will you? I'll learn you to hide out on Larry Nott!"

"Lemme go! Lemme—" ^{at} Lucky pulled back, braced with his heels, got himself stopped. Then his whole body coiled like a spring and let go in one convulsive, passionate lunge. The spike, still in his hand, came down on the detective's head, and he felt it crush. He stood there, looking down at something dark and formless, lying across the rails . . .

Hurrying down the track he became aware of the spike, gave it a toss, heard it splash in the ditch. Soon he realized that his steps on the ties were being telegraphed by the listening rail, and he plunged across the ditch to the highway. There he resumed his rapid walk, trying not to run. But every time a car overtook him his heels lifted queerly, and his breath first stopped, then came in gasps as he listened for the car to stop.

He came to a crossroads, turned quickly to his right. He let himself run here, for the road wasn't lighted as the main highway was, and there weren't many cars. The running tired him, but it eased the sick feeling in his stomach. He came to a sign that told him Los Angeles was 17 miles, and to his left. He turned, walked, ran, stooped down sometimes, pant-

ing, to rest. After a while it came to him why he had to get to Los Angeles, and so soon. The soup kitchen opened at seven o'clock. He had to be there, in that same soup kitchen where he had had supper, so it would look as though he had never been away.

When the lights went off, and it came broad daylight with the suddenness of Southern California, he was in the city, and a clock told him it was ten minutes after five. He thought he had time. He pressed on, exhausted, but never relaxing his rapid, half-shuffling walk.

It was ten minutes to seven when he got to the soup kitchen, and he quickly walked past it. He wanted to be clear at the end of the line, so he could have a word with Shorty, the man who dished out the soup, without impatient shoves from behind, and growls to keep moving.

Shorty remembered him.
"Still here, hey?"

"Still here."

"Three in a row for you. Holy smoke, they ought be collecting for you by the month."

"Thought you'd be off."

"Who, me?"

"Sunday, ain't it?"

"Sunday? Wake up. This is Saturday."

"Saturday? You're kidding."

"Kidding my eye, this is Saturday, and a big day in this town, too."

"One day looks like another to me."

"Not this one. Parade."

"Yeah?"

"Shriners. You get that free."

"Well, that's my name, Lucky."

"My name's Shorty, but I'm over six feet."

"Nothing like that with me. I really got luck."

"You sure?"

"Like, for instance, getting a hunk of meat."

"I didn't give you no meat."

"Ain't you going to?"

"Shove your plate over quick. Don't let nobody see."

"Thanks."

"Okay, Lucky. Don't miss the parade."

"I won't."

He sat at the rough table with the others, dipped his bread in the soup, tried to eat, but his throat kept contracting from excitement and he made slow work of it. He had what he wanted from Shorty. He had fixed the day, and not only the day but the date, for it would be the same date as the big Shriners' parade. He had fixed his name, with a little gag. Shorty wouldn't forget him. His throat relaxed and he wolfed the piece of meat.

Near the soup kitchen he saw signs: *Lincoln Park Pharmacy*, *Lincoln Park Cafeteria*.

"Which way is the park, buddy?" If it was a big park he might find a thicket where he could lie down, rest his aching legs.

"Straight down, you'll see it."

There was a fence around it, but he found a gate, opened it, slipped in. Ahead of him was a thicket, but the ground was wet from a stream that ran through it. He crossed a small bridge, followed a path. He came to a stable, peeped in. It was empty, but the floor was thickly covered with new hay. He went in, made for a dark corner, burrowed under the hay, closed his eyes.

For a few moments everything slipped away, except warmth, relaxation, ease. But then something began to drill into the back of his mind: Where did he spend last night? Where would he tell them he spent last night? He tried to think, but nothing would come to him. He would have said that he spent it where he spent the night before, but he hadn't spent it in Los Angeles. He had spent it in Santa Barbara, and come down in the morning on a truck. He had never spent a night in Los Angeles. He didn't know the places. He had no

answers to the questions that were now pounding at him like sledge-hammers:

"What's that? Where you say you was?"

"In a flophouse."

"Which flophouse?"

"I didn't pay no attention which flophouse. It was just a flophouse."

"Where was this flophouse at?"

"I don't know where it was at. I never been to Los Angeles before. I don't know the names of no streets."

"What this flophouse look like?"

"Looked like a flophouse."

"Come on, don't give us no gags. What this flophouse look like? Ain't you got eyes, can't you say what this here place looked like? What's the matter, can't you talk?"

Something gripped his arm and he felt himself being lifted. Something of terrible strength had hold of him and he was going straight up in the air. He squirmed to get loose, then was plopped on his feet and released. He turned, terrified.

An elephant was standing there, exploring his clothes with its trunk. He knew then that he had been asleep. But when he backed away, he bumped into another elephant. He slipped between the two elephants, slithered past a third to the

door, which was open about a foot. Out in the sunlight he made his way back across the little bridge, saw what he hadn't noticed before: pens with deer in them, and ostriches, and mountain sheep, that told him he had stumbled into a zoo.

It was after four o'clock, so he must have slept a long time in the hay. Back on the street he felt a sobbing laugh rise in his throat. *That* was where he had spent the night. "In the elephant house at Lincoln Park."

"What?"

"That's right. In the elephant house."

"What you giving us? A stall?"

"It ain't no stall. I was in the elephant house."

"With them elephants?"

"That's right."

"How you get in there?"

"Just went in. The door was open."

"Just went in there, seen the elephants, and bedded down with them?"

"I thought they was horses."

"You thought them elephants was horses?"

"It was dark. I dug in under the hay. I never knowed they was elephants till morning."

"How come you went in this place?"

"I left the soup kitchen and in a couple of minutes I came

to the park. I went in there, looking for some grass to lie down on. Then I come to this here place, looked to me like a stable, I peeped in, seen the hay, and hit it."

"And you wasn't scared of them elephants?"

"It was dark, I tell you, and I could hear them eating the hay, but I thought they was horses. I was tired, and I wanted someplace to sleep."

"Then what?"

"Then when it got light, and I seen they was elephants, I run out of there, and beat it."

"Couldn't you tell them elephants by the smell?"

"I never noticed no smell."

"How many elephants was there?"

"Three."

He brushed wisps of hay off his denims. They had been fairly new, but now they were black with the grime of the coal gond. Suddenly his heart stopped, a suffocating feeling swept over him. The questions started again, hammered at him, beat into his brain.

"Where that coal dust come from?"

"I don't know. The freights, I guess."

"Don't you know it ain't no coal ever shipped into this part of the state? Don't you know that here all they burn is gas? Don't you know it ain't only

been but one coal car shipped in here in six months and that come in by a misread train order? Don't you know that car was part of that train this here detective was riding that got killed? *Don't you know that?* Come on, out with it, WHERE THAT COAL DUST COME FROM?"

Getting rid of the denims instantly became an obsession. He felt that people were looking at him on the street, spying the coal dust, waiting till he got by, then running into drug stores to phone the office that he had just passed by. It was like those dreams he sometimes had, where he was walking through crowds naked, except that this was no dream and he wasn't naked; he was wearing these denims, these telltale denims with coal dust all over them. He clenched his hands, had a moment of terrible concentration, headed into a filling station.

"Hello."

"Hello."

"What's the chances on a job?"

"No chances."

"Why not?"

"Don't need anybody."

"That's not the only reason."

"There's about forty-two other reasons, one of them is I can't even make a living myself,

but it's all the reason that concerns you. Here's a dime, kid. Better luck somewhere else."

"I don't want your dime. I want a job. If the clothes were better, that might help, mightn't it?"

"If the clothes were good enough for Clark Gable in the swell gambling-house scene, that wouldn't help a bit. Not a bit. I just don't need anybody; that's all."

"Suppose I got better clothes. Would you talk to me?"

"Talk to you anytime, but I don't need anybody."

"I'll be back when I get the clothes."

"Just taking a walk for nothing."

"What's your name?"

"Hook's my name. Oscar Hook."

"Thanks, Mr. Hook. But I'm coming back. I just got an idea I can talk myself into a job. I'm some talker."

"You're all of that, kid. But don't waste your time. I don't need anybody."

"Okay. Just the same, I'll be back."

He headed for the center of town, asked the way to the cheap clothing stores. At Los Angeles and Temple, after an hour's trudge, he came to a succession of small stores in a

Mexican quarter. He went into one. The storekeeper was a Mexican, and two or three other Mexicans were standing around, smoking.

"Mister, will you trust me for a pair of white pants and a shirt?"

"No trust. Hey, scram."

"Look. I can have a job Monday morning if I can show up in that outfit. White pants and a white shirt. That's all."

"No trust. What you think this is, anyway?"

"Well, I got to get that outfit somewhere. If I get that they'll let me go to work Monday, I'll pay you soon as I get paid off Saturday night."

"No trust. Sell for cash."

He stood there. The Mexicans stood there, smoked, looked out at the street. Presently one of them looked at him. "What kind of job, hey? What you mean, got to have white pants a white shirt a hold a job?"

"Filling station. They got a rule you got to have white clothes before you can work there."

"Oh. Sure. Filling station."

After a while the storekeeper spoke. "Ha! Is a joke. Job in filling station, must have a white pants, white shirt. Ha! Is a joke."

"What else would I want them for? Holy smoke, these

are better for the road, ain't they? Say, a guy don't want white pants to ride freights, does he?"

"What filling station? Tell me that?"

"Guy name of Hook, Oscar Hook, got a Acme station, Main near Twentieth. You don't believe me, call him up."

"You go to work there, hey?"

"I'm *supposed* to go to work. I *told* him I'd get the white pants and white shirt, somehow. Well—if I don't get them I don't go to work."

"Why you come to me?"

"Where else would I go? If it's not you, it's another guy down the street. Noplace else I can dig up the stuff over Sunday, is there?"

He stood around. They all stood around. Then once again the storekeeper looked up. "What size you wear, hey?"

He had a wash at a tap in the back yard, then changed there, between piled-up boxes and crates. The storekeeper gave him a white shirt, white pants, necktie, a suit of thick underwear, and a pair of shoes to replace his badly worn brogans. "Is pretty cold, night-time, now. A thick underwear feel better."

"Okay. Much obliged."

"Can roll this other stuff up."

"I don't want it. Can you throw it away for me?"

"Is pretty dirty."

"Plenty dirty."

"You no want?"

"No."

His heart leaped as the storekeeper dropped the whole pile into a rubbish brazier and touched a match to some papers at the bottom of it. In a few minutes the denims and everything else he had worn were ashes.

He followed the storekeeper inside. "Okay, here is a bill. I put all a stuff on a bill, no charge you more than anybody else. Is six dollar ninety-eight cents, then is a service charge one dollar."

All of them laughed. He took the "service charge" to be a gyp overcharge to cover the trust. He nodded. "Okay on the service charge."

The storekeeper hesitated. "Well, six ninety-eight. We no make a service charge."

"Thanks."

"See you keep a white pants clean till Monday morning."

"I'll do that. See you Saturday night."

"Adios."

Out in the street he stuck his hand in his pocket, felt something, pulled it out. It was a \$1 bill. Then he understood about the "service charge," and why the Mexican had laughed.

He went back, kissed the \$1 bill, waved a cheery salute into the store. They all waved back.

He rode a street car down to Mr. Hook's, got turned down for the job, rode a street car back. In his mind he tried to check over everything. He had an alibi, fantastic and plausible. So far as he could recall, nobody on the train had seen him, not even the other hoboes, for he had stood apart from them in the yards and had done nothing to attract the attention of any of them. The denims were burned, and he had a story to account for the whites. It even looked pretty good, this thing with Mr. Hook, for anybody who had committed a murder would be most unlikely to make a serious effort to land a job.

But the questions lurked there, ready to spring at him, check and recheck as he would. He saw a sign: *5-Course Dinner, 35 Cents.* He still had ninety cents, and went in, ordered steak and fried potatoes, the hungry man's dream of heaven. He ate, put a ten-cent tip under the plate. He ordered cigarettes, lit one, inhaled. He got up to go. A newspaper was lying on the table. The headline read:

L. R. NOTT, R. R. MAN, KILLED

On the street he bought a

paper, tried to open it under a street light, couldn't, tucked it under his arm. He found Highway 101, caught a hay truck bound for San Francisco. Going out Sunset Boulevard it unexpectedly pulled over to the curb and stopped. He looked warily around. Down a side-street, about a block away, were the two red lights of a police station. He was tightening to jump and run, but the driver wasn't looking at the lights. "I told them bums that air hose was leaking. They set you nuts. Supposed to keep the stuff in shape and all they ever do is sit around and play blackjack."

The driver fished a roll of black tape from his pocket and got out. Lucky sat where he was a few minutes, then climbed down, walked to the glare of the headlights, opened his paper. There it was:

L. R. NOTT, R. R. MAN, KILLED

The decapitated body of L. R. Nott, 1327 De Soto Street, a detective assigned to a northbound freight, was found early this morning on the track near San Fernando station. It is believed he lost his balance while the train was shunting cars at the San Fernando siding and fell beneath the wheels. Funer-

al services will be held tomorrow.

Mr. Nott is survived by a widow, formerly Miss Elsie Snowden of Mannerheim, and a son, L. R. Nott, Jr., 5.

He stared at it, refolded the paper, tucked it under his arm, walked back to where the driver was taping the air hose. He was clear, and he knew it. "Boy, do they call you Lucky? Is your name Lucky? I'll say it is."

He leaned against the trailer, let his eye wander down the street. He saw the two red lights of the police station—glowing. He looked away quickly. A queer feeling began to stir inside him. He wished the driver would hurry up.

Presently he went back to the headlights again, found the notice, reread it. He recognized that feeling now: it was the old Sunday-night feeling that he used to have back home when the bells would ring and he would have to stop playing hide in the twilight, go to church, and hear about the necessity for being saved. It shot through his mind, the time he had played hookey from church and hid in the livery stable; and how lonely he had felt, because there was nobody to play hide with; and how he had sneaked into church and stood in the

rear to listen to the necessity for being saved.

His eyes twitched back to the red lights, and shakily, but unswervingly, he found himself walking toward them.

"I want to give myself up."

"Yeah, I know, you're wanted for grand larceny in Hackensack, N.J."

"No, I—"

"We quit giving them rides when the New Deal come in. Beat it."

"I killed a man."

"You—? . . . When was it you done this?"

"Last night,"

"Where?"

"Near here, San Fernando. It was like this—"

"Hey, wait till I get a card . . . Okay, what's your name?"

"Ben Fuller."

"No middle name?"

"They call me Lucky."

"Lucky like in good luck?"

"Yes, sir . . . Lucky like in good luck."



Georges Simenon

Mme. Maigret's Admirer

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

Another novelet about Inspector Maigret — about the weary, grunting, irritated, exasperated, hesitating, ruminating, stubborn, solemn Maigret, one of the great gumshoes of fiction, a striking and powerful character for all his stolid solidity...

Detective: INSPECTOR MAIGRET

In the Maigret household, as in most families, there had arisen certain traditions which had come, in time, to take on much significance. For instance, after they had been living in the Place des Vosges for years and years, the Inspector had acquired the habit, in summer, of beginning to loosen the knot of his dark tie as he started up the stairway from the court — a process which lasted exactly the length of time it took him to reach the first floor.

The apartment house, like all those on the Place, had once been a sumptuous mansion; the first flight of the staircase rose majestically with wrought-iron railings and imitation marble walls. But the second flight became narrow and steep; and

thus Maigret, who was growing rather short of wind, could mount to his own floor with his collar open.

By the time he had gone down a dimly lit corridor and inserted his key in his own door (the third on the left), he would have his coat over his arm. Unfailingly he would call out, "Here I am!" — sniff around, deduce from the aromas what there was for lunch, then enter the dining room, where the large window would be open upon the dazzling spectacle of the Place where four fountains sang.

This June there was a slight addition to the ritual.

The weather was particularly hot. The P.J. — as Maigret's colleagues always shortened

their formal title of *Police Judiciaire*, or Judiciary Police — thought of nothing but their vacations. Occasionally gentlemen could be seen in shirt-sleeves on the smartest boulevards; and beer poured in torrents at every sidewalk café.

"Have you seen your admirer?" Maigret would ask his wife as he settled himself by the window and mopped his brow.

No one could have thought, at this moment, that he had just come from hours of work in that anti-criminal laboratory which is the Judiciary Police — hours of poring over the darkest and most disheartening involutions of the human soul. When he was off duty, the least trifles could amuse him, especially when it involved teasing the ever naive Mme. Maigret. For two weeks now, his standing joke had been to ask her for news of her admirer.

"Has he taken his two little prowls around the Place? Is he still just as mysterious, just as distinguished? When I think that you have a weakness for distinguished men . . . and married me!"

Mme. Maigret would be coming and going from kitchen to table. She had no use for a maid; a cleaning woman for the heavy work was enough. She would play up the game with

faint irritation: "I never said he was distinguished!"

"Ah, but you've described him: pearl-gray hat, little pointed mustaches (probably dyed), cane with a carved ivory head..."

"Go on! Laugh! Some day you'll admit I'm right. This isn't just a man like anybody else. There's something serious behind the way he's acting. . . ."

From the window one would notice automatically the comings and goings on the Place — somewhat deserted in the morning but filled in the afternoon with the mothers and servants of the neighborhood, sitting on the benches and watching the children at play.

The square, girded with grillwork, is one of the most typical in Paris. The houses stand about it in precise identity, with their arcades and their steep slate roofs. And the four fountains sing. . . .

At first Mme. Maigret had scarcely noticed the stranger, and that by accident. It was hard not to notice him; both in appearance and in attitude he seemed twenty or thirty years dated — an elderly gallant such as one now sees only in the cartoons of humorous magazines. It was early one morning, when all the windows around the Place were open, and you could watch the servants going

about their housework.

"He looks as if he were hunting for something," Mme. Maigret thought to herself.

That afternoon she had gone to visit her sister. The next morning, at precisely the same hour, she rediscovered her stranger. With even stride he strolled around the Place, once, twice, then vanished in the direction of the Boulevard.

"Fellow with a weakness for cute little maids — likes to watch them shake out the rugs," said Maigret, when his wife, relating this and that of the day's events, brought up her elderly gallant.

But that very afternoon she was not a little startled to see him, at three o'clock, sitting on a bench directly facing her house — motionless, both hands clasped on the ivory head of his cane. At four, he was still there. Not until five did he rise and go off down the Rue des Tournelles, without having exchanged a word with anyone, without so much as having glanced at a newspaper.

"Don't you think there's something funny about that, Maigret?" For Mme. Maigret had always called her husband by his family name.

"I told you once: he was happy just watching the pretty little maids around him."

The next day Mme. Maigret

brought it up again: "I kept a sharp eye on him; he sat there two hours on the same bench without a move..."

"Come now! Maybe it was to watch you! From that bench anybody can see into our apartment, and this gentleman is in love with you and —"

"Don't be silly!"

"Besides, he uses a cane and you've always loved men with canes. I'll bet he wears a monocle..."

"And why, pray?"

"You've always had a weakness for men with monocles."

They chaffed each other gently, securely savoring the inner peace of twenty years of marriage.

"But listen! I looked all around him, very carefully. To be sure, there was one maid, sitting right opposite him. She's a girl I'd already noticed at the fruit store, first of all because she's so pretty, then because she seems very distinguished..."

"That's it!" Maigret cried triumphantly. "Your distinguished servant sits opposite your distinguished gentleman. You may have noticed that women are apt to sit down without too much heed to the perspectives which they may uncover; so your admirer has spent the day leering at —"

"That's all you ever think of!"

"Since I haven't yet seen your mystery-man—"

"Can I help it if he never shows up when you're home?"

And Maigret, whose life intersected so many tragedies, plunged himself into these simple pleasantries and never forgot to demand the latest news of the individual who had become, in their private language, Mme. Maigret's admirer.

"Go on; laugh if you want to. But just the same there's something about him, I don't know what, but it fascinates me and makes me just a little afraid. . . I don't know how to say it. When once you look at him, you can't take your eyes off him. For hours on end he just sits there and doesn't move a muscle. He doesn't even shift his eyes behind his glasses."

"You can see behind his glasses. . . from here?"

Mme. Maigret almost blushed, as though caught red-handed. "I went over to look at him closer. Especially I wanted to see if you were right about. . . perspectives. Well, the blonde maid always has two children with her and she couldn't be more proper and you can't see a thing."

"She stays there all afternoon, too?"

"She comes around three,

usually before *he* does. She always has her crocheting with her. They leave at almost the very same moment. For whole hours she works at her crocheting without so much as raising her head excepting to call the children if they wander too far away."

"And you really don't think, darling, that the Paris squares are full of hundreds of maids knitting or crocheting for hours on end while they mind their employers' children?"

"Well, maybe. . ."

"And just as many retired old men who have no interest in life but to warm themselves in the sun while contemplating an agreeable young figure?"

"But this one isn't old!"

"You told me yourself that his mustache was dyed and he must be wearing a wig."

"Yes, but that doesn't make him old."

"About my age, then?"

"Sometimes he acts older and sometimes younger. . ."

And Maigret grumbled, with assumed jealousy, "One of these days I'll have to go over there in person and settle accounts with this admirer of yours!"

Neither of them took any of this seriously. In the same way they had for some time taken a great and playful interest in a loving pair who met every night

under the arcades. The Maigrets had followed intently each quarrel, each reconciliation, until the girl, who worked at the creamery, had one night met another young man at precisely the same spot.

"You know, Maigret . . ."

"What?"

"I've been thinking . . . I've been wondering if that man is there to spy on somebody . . ."

The days went by and the sun grew hotter and hotter. Now, in the evening, the Place was filled with an ever denser crowd of working people from the nearby streets who came seeking a little fresh air by the four fountains.

"What looks funny to me is that he never sits down in the mornings. And why does he always walk around the Place twice, as if he were waiting for a signal?"

"What's your pretty blonde doing, all this time in the morning?"

"I can't see her then. She works in a house down on the right and from here you can't see what goes on there. I meet her when I'm marketing, but she doesn't talk to a soul except to tell what she wants to buy. She doesn't even argue about the price, so she gets cheated at least twenty per cent. She always looks as though she were thinking about something else."

"Fine! The next time I need a really delicate investigation handled, I'll put you on it instead of my men."

"Make fun of me! Go on! But someday you'll see . . ."

It was eight o'clock. Maigret had finished dinner — amazingly early, since he was usually kept late at the Quai-des-Orfèvres. He was in shirtsleeves, his pipe in his mouth, his elbows resting on the window while he vaguely contemplated the rosy sky, soon to be invaded by darkness, and the Place des Vosges, filled with a crowd exhausted by the precocious summer.

Behind him he heard the noises which meant that Mme. Maigret was finishing the dishes and would soon join him with her sewing.

Evenings like this were rare — evenings with no dirty mess to clear up, no murderer to discover, no thief to shadow, evenings when a man's thoughts could roam at peace. Maigret's pipe had never tasted so good. Then suddenly, without turning, he called out, "Henriette?"

"Do you want something?"

"Come here . . ."

With the stem of his pipe he guided her eye to the bench directly facing them. At one end of the bench a bum was napping. At the other end . . .

"That's the one!" Mme. Maigret asserted. "Of all things!"

It seemed to her almost indecent that her afternoon admirer should have so violated his schedule as to appear on the bench at such an hour.

"He looks as though he's fallen asleep," Maigret murmured, as he relit his pipe. "If there weren't two flights of stairs to climb, I'd go have a look at your admirer, just to see what he's really like."

Mme. Maigret went back to the kitchen. Maigret followed the argument of three small boys, who wound up rolling in the dust while more boys circled them on roller skates.

Maigret had not moved by the time his second pipe was finished. Neither had the stranger. The bum had lurched off toward the wharfs of the Seine. Mme. Maigret had taken her place by the window, cloth and scissors and dress pattern in her lap — the housewife incapable of sitting still for an hour with nothing to do.

"Is he still there?"

"Yes."

"Aren't they going to close the gates?"

"In a few minutes. The watchman's beginning to herd people toward the exits."

The watchman seemed not to notice the stranger. The man

on the bench still did not move and three of the gates were already locked. The watchman was about to turn the key in the fourth when Maigret, without a word, seized his coat and started downstairs.

From the window Mme. Maigret saw him arguing with the man in green, who took his duties seriously. At last the man admitted the Inspector, who walked straight toward the stranger with the glasses.

Mme. Maigret had risen. She felt that something was happening and she gestured to her husband, a gesture that meant, "Is this it?" She couldn't have said clearly what it was, but for days and days she had been apprehensive that *something* was about to happen. Maigret nodded to her, stationed the watchman by the gate, and climbed back to their apartment.

"My collar, my tie. . . ."

"He's dead?"

"About as dead as anyone can be. For at least two hours or I'm losing my touch."

"Do you think he had an attack?"

Silence from Maigret. Tying a tie was always something of a problem for him.

"What are you going to do?"

"What should I be doing? Start the investigation going. Notify Headquarters, the medi-

cal office, the whole works..."

A velvet darkness had fallen on the Place. The song of the fountains seemed louder. As always, the fourth one had a tone a trifle sharper than the others.

A few moments later, Maigret entered the tobacco shop in the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, made a series of phone calls, and found a policeman to station at the gate instead of the watchman.

Mme. Maigret had no wish to go downstairs. She knew that her husband loathed the thought of her intervening in his cases. She understood, too, that for once he was at ease; no one had noticed the corpse with the glasses, nor the comings and goings of the Inspector.

Besides, the Place was almost deserted. The people from the flower shop downstairs were sitting in front of their door, and the dealer in automobile accessories, in his long gray smock, had come over to chat with them.

They were astonished to see a car stop before the gate and proceed into the square. They drew nearer when they saw a second car with a solemn gentleman who must belong to Police Headquarters. At last, when the ambulance arrived, the group of curious onlookers

had grown to almost fifty people, not one of whom suspected the reason for this strange assembly, since the shrubbery concealed the focal scene.

Mme. Maigret had not lit the lamps; she rarely did when she was alone. She kept looking around the Place, watching the windows open, but she saw no sign of the pretty blonde maid.

The ambulance left first, headed for the Medico-Legal Institute. Then a car with certain people; then Maigret, chatting on the sidewalk with some men before he crossed the street and re-entered his home.

"You aren't lighting up," he grumbled.

She turned the switch.

"Close the window. It's cooled off."

This was no longer the detached Maigret of a short while ago, but Maigret of the P.J., Maigret whose attacks of bad temper made young Inspectors tremble.

"Stop that sewing! You get on my nerves! Can't you sit still a minute?"

She stopped. He paced up and down the little room, his hands behind his back, favoring his wife with an occasional curious glance.

"Why did you tell me he seemed sometimes young, sometimes old?"

"I don't know... just an impression. Why? How old is he?"

"He can't be more than thirty."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that this pal of yours isn't remotely what he seemed to be. I'm saying that under his wig there was young blond hair, that his dyed mustache was a phony, that he was wearing a sort of corset which gave him that stiffness of an elderly gallant."

"But—"

"No buts about it. I'm still wondering just what sort of miracle made you sniff out this case."

He seemed to hold her responsible for what had happened, for his ruined evening, for all the hard work ahead.

"You know what's happened? Your admirer's been murdered, there on that bench."

"It isn't possible! Right in front of everybody?"

"In front of everybody, and undoubtedly at the exact moment when there were the most witnesses."

"Do you think the maid —?"

"I've sent the bullet down to an expert. He should phone me any minute."

"But how could anybody fire a revolver in—?"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders and waited for the phone call. It came promptly.

"Hello!... Yes, I thought so, too... But I needed you to confirm it."

Mme. Maigret was all impatience; but her husband deliberately took his time, grumbling to himself as though it were no concern of hers. "Compressed air rifle... special model... very rare..."

"I don't understand..."

"That means the fellow was killed from a distance—by somebody, for instance, ambushed in one of the windows on the Place. He could take his time to aim, but he must have been a first-class shot. He hit the heart exactly; death was instantaneous."

Like that, there in the sunlight, while the crowd...

Mme. Maigret suddenly began to cry, from sheer nervous exhaustion. She apologized awkwardly, "I'm sorry. It was too much for me. It does seem to me as though I have something to do with this. I know it's silly, but..."

"When you've pulled yourself together, I'll take your deposition as a witness."

"Me? A witness?"

"Hang it, you're the only person so far who can give us any useful information, thanks to the curiosity that drove you

to..." And Maigret went on, still as if talking to himself, to give her a few of the facts:

"The man hadn't a single paper on him. Pockets practically empty, aside from a few hundred-franc bills, some change, a very small key, and a nail file. We'll try to identify him anyway."

"Only thirty!" Mme. Maigret repeated.

It was astonishing. And now she could understand the almost sinister fascination she had sensed in this youth congealed, like a wax image, into the postures of an old man.

"Are you ready to testify?"

"I'm listening."

"I ask you to note that I am questioning you in my official capacity and that I shall be obliged tomorrow to draw up a formal deposition as a result of this interview."

Mme. Maigret smiled. It was a pale smile; she found this shift to an official relationship oddly impressive.

"Did you notice this man today?"

"I didn't see him this morning; I went marketing at the Halles. In the afternoon he was at his usual place."

"And the blonde maid?"

"She was there, too, as usual."

"You never caught them speaking to each other?"

"They'd have had to talk very loud; they were about eight meters apart."

"And they'd sit there, motionless, all afternoon?"

"Except when the woman was crocheting."

"Always crocheting? For a whole two weeks?"

"Yes."

"You didn't notice what type of crochet work she was doing?"

"No. If it had been knitting, that's something I know about, but —"

"When did the woman leave this afternoon?"

"I don't know. I was fixing the custard. Probably around five, as usual."

"Around five... which is just when the doctor fixes the time of death. But there's a leeway of minutes one way or the other. Did the woman leave before five or after five, before the murder or after the murder? And why the devil did you have to pick today of all days to make a custard? If you're going to take up spying on people, you should carry it through to the finish!"

"Do you think that woman...?"

"I don't think anything! All I know is that I've nothing to base my investigation on but your reports... which are something short of detailed. Do you

happen to know so much as where your blonde maid works?"

"She always goes home to 17 bis."

"And who lives at 17 bis?"

"I don't know... People with a big American car and a chauffeur who looks like a foreigner."

"That's all you've noticed, is it? You'd make a fine policeman, I must say! A big American car and a chauffeur who—" He was play-acting, as he so often did when an investigation led nowhere; now his anger dissolved into a smile. "You know, old girl, if you hadn't taken an interest in your admirer's carryings-on, I'd be in a beautiful jam right now? I'm not saying that the situation is perfect, or that the investigation will solve itself like *that*; but at least we've got something to start with, however slight..."

"The beautiful blonde?"

"The beautiful blonde. And that reminds me—" He hurried to the phone and ordered an Inspector stationed in front of 17 bis with instructions, if a beautiful blonde emerged, not to lose sight of her at any cost.

"And now to bed. There'll be time enough tomorrow morning."

He was half asleep when

the timid voice of his wife ventured, "You don't think maybe it might be a good idea to—"

"No, no, and no!" He half sat up in bed. "Just because you very nearly displayed a minor talent is no reason to start in giving me advice! Besides, it's time to sleep."

And time for the moon to silver the slate roofs of the Place des Vosges, time for the four fountains to continue their recital of chamber music, with the fourth seeming always a little hurried, a little out of tune.

When Maigret, face daubed with shaving soap, suspenders hanging down, cast his first glance out over the Place des Vosges, an impressive group had already gathered about the bench where the corpse had been discovered.

The owner of the flower shop, better informed than the rest since she had been present (even if at a distance) when the police arrived, was giving voluble explanations. Her categorical gestures emphasized the certainty of her opinions.

Everyone in the neighborhood was there. Passersby, who a moment before had been hurrying to be on time at shop or office, had sudden-

ly found leisure to stop at the scene of the crime.

"Do you know that woman over there?" The Inspector used the handle of his razor to indicate a young woman who stood out from those around her. The fresh elegance of her English-cut costume seemed more suited to a morning stroll on the Bois de Boulogne than to the Place des Vosges.

"I have never seen her. At least I don't think so..."

It might mean nothing. The apartments on the first floors of the Place des Vosges may contain the upper middle class and even the lesser levels of the world of Society. Still Maigret stared at the woman irritably; women of her class rarely set out afoot at eight in the morning, unless it's to walk the dog.

"Now, look: this morning you're going to do some extensive marketing. You're to go into every shop. Listen to everything they say, and above all try to find out anything you can about the blonde maid and her employers."

"And for once you can't make fun of me for gossiping!" Mme. Maigret smiled. "When will you be back?"

"Do I know?"

For he knew the investiga-

tion had gone ahead while he slept, and he hoped to find at the Quai-des-Orfèvres some solid basis for his own inquiries.

At eleven o'clock the previous evening, for instance, the famous medico-legal expert, Dr. Hébrard, was in full evening dress, attending a first night at the Comédie-Française, when he received a message. He waited until the last act, and then paused at a box to congratulate an actress with whom his relations were non-professional. A quarter of an hour later, at the Medico-Legal Institute (which is the new name for the morgue), one of his assistants handed him his white working smock while an attendant withdrew from one of the endless niches in the wall the frozen corpse of the unknown man from the bench in the Place des Vosges.

At the same time, in the Palace of Justice, where the files contain details on all the criminals of France and most of the criminals of the world, two men in gray smocks patiently compared fingerprints:

Not far from them, up a spiral staircase, the specialists of the police laboratory began their meticulous work on certain objects: one dark suit (old-fashioned), two shoes

(buttoned), one cane (rattan with carved ivory handle), one wig, one pair of glasses, and one tuft of blond hair cut from the dead man's head.

When Maigret had greeted his colleagues, held a brief talk with his chief, and entered his office (which still smelled of cold pipe smoke despite the open window), three reports were waiting for him, neatly arranged on his desk.

First, Dr. Hébrard's report:

Death almost instantaneous. Bullet fired from distance of at least 20 meters, possibly 100. Weapon of small caliber but great penetrative force.

Probable age: 28.

Complete absence of occupational deformations; probably that man had never worked at manual labor. On the other hand, evidence of extensive pursuit of sports, especially rowing and boxing.

Perfect health. Remarkable physique. Scar on left shoulder indicates bullet wound, probably deflected by shoulder-blade, some three years ago.

Finally, a certain thickening of the ends of the fingers indicates unknown had carried on fairly extensive work on typewriter.

Maigret read slowly, smok-

ing his pipe in little puffs and breaking off now and then to watch the Seine flowing in the morning dazzle of the sun. From time to time he would jot down a word or two, which only he could understand, in the notebook renowned alike for its cheapness and for its accumulation, over the years, of a hieroglyphic mass of notes, written around and even over each other.

The laboratory report was no more sensational:

The clothes had been worn by others before their present owner; everything indicated he had bought them, untraceably, from a pawnshop or second-hand dealer.

Same origin for the cane and the buttoned shoes.

The wig was of reasonably good quality but nondescript—a model available at any wig-maker's.

Examination of the dust in the garments revealed a sizable quantity of very fine flour—not pure, but mixed with traces of bran.

Glasses: unground glass, with no effect on the sight.

From the files, nothing; no trace of the victim's fingerprints on record.

Maigret sat dreamily for a few minutes, his elbows on his desk. The case looked

neither good nor bad—perhaps at the moment rather on the bad side, since Chance, usually reasonably cooperative, had contributed not the slightest assistance.

At last he rose, clapped on his hat, and approached the usher stationed in the corridor. "If anybody asks for me, I'll be back in about an hour."

He was too near the Place des Vosges to take a taxi. He strolled back along the Seine. In the fruit shop on the Rue des Tournelles he noticed Mme. Maigret in spirited conversation with three or four of the neighborhood gossips. He turned his head to hide a smile, and continued on his way.

When Maigret first entered the police force, one of his chiefs, absorbed in the then new methods of scientific detection, used to keep telling him, "Look here, young man! Go easy on the imagination. A policeman works with facts, not ideas!" Which had not kept Maigret from using his imagination, and cutting out a nice little career for himself with it.

Just so now, as he reached the Place des Vosges, he was concerned less with the technical details of the morning's reports than with what he

would call the *feel* of the crime.

He tried to imagine the victim, not as the corpse he had seen, but as a living boy of twenty-eight—blond, heavy-set, well built, undoubtedly elegant, putting on every morning his elderly-gallant outfit, his costume bought off some flea-ridden pushcart—and yet always wearing the best linen under it.

Then taking two turns around the Place and going off along the Rue des Tournelles.

Where did he go? What did he do until three in the afternoon? Did he retain his role of the hero of some nineteenth-century comedy by Labiche, or did he have a nearby room where he changed?

How was it possible for him then to sit motionless for three hours on a bench, without opening his mouth, without making a single gesture, staring at one point in space?

How long had this been going on?

And where did he go at night? What was his private life? Whom did he see? Whom did he talk to? To whom did he surrender the secret of his personality? Why the flour and the traces of bran in his

clothes? The bran indicated a mill rather than a bakery. What would he be doing in a mill?

Maigret's thoughts carried him past *17 bis*. He retraced his steps, entered the gate and addressed the concierge.

She showed no reaction to his police badge. "Well? What do you want?"

"I wanted to know which of your tenants employs a maid—rather pretty, blonde, elegant..."

"Mlle. Rita?" she interrupted.

"Might well be. Every afternoon she takes two children out in the Place—"

"Her employers' children. Monsieur and Mme. Krofta—they've lived on the first floor for fifteen years and more. They were even here before me. M. Krofta is in the import and export business; I think his office is in the Rue du 4-Septembre..."

"Is he at home?"

"He just went out, but I think Madame is upstairs."

"And Rita?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her this morning; I was busy doing the stairs..."

A few moments later, Maigret rang at the first floor apartment. He could hear a noise far off inside, but nobody answered. He rang again. At last the door

opened. He saw a fairly young woman, trying to cover her body with a scant dressing gown.

"Yes?"

"I'd like to speak to M. or Mme. Krofta. I'm an Inspector from the Judiciary Police."

She opened the door reluctantly, holding the gown tightly closed in front of her. Maigret entered a magnificent apartment, with vast, high-ceilinged rooms, tasteful furnishings, and expensive ornaments.

"Do forgive me for receiving you like this, but I'm alone with the children. How did you happen to get here so quickly? It can't be fifteen minutes since my husband left."

She was a foreigner, to judge from a light accent and a thoroughly Central European charm. Maigret had already recognized in her the well-tailored woman whom he had noticed that morning, listening to the gossips in the midst of the Place des Vosges.

"You were expecting me?" he murmured in a tone intended to disguise his astonishment.

"You or somebody. But I hadn't any idea the police would be so quick. I suppose my husband is coming back?"

"I don't know."

"You didn't see him?"

"No."

"But then how...?"

There was quite evidently a misunderstanding, from which Maigret could hardly help learning something useful. He had no intention of clearing it up.

The young woman, possibly to gain a moment to think things over, stammered, "Do you mind for just a minute? The children are in the bathroom and I can't help wondering if they're up to something."

She went off with supple steps. She was truly beautiful, in body as well as face.

He could hear her exchanging whispers with the children in the bathroom. Then she came back, a faint smile of welcome on her lips.

"Please excuse me; I never even asked you to sit down. I do wish my husband were here. He's the one who really knows the value of the jewels; after all, he bought them."

Jewels? And why this faint discomfort, this impatience for the husband's return? She seemed almost afraid to speak, anxious to keep the conversation such that she could say nothing compromising.

Maigret had no desire to be helpful. He gazed at her

with as neutral an expression as possible, putting on what he called his "fat-and-friendly" face.

"You keep reading in the papers about robberies but, it's funny, you never think it can happen to you. Why, even last night I didn't have any idea... It was only this morning..."

"When did you get home?" Maigret put in.

She gave a start. "How did you know I went out?"

"Because I saw you."

"You were here in the neighborhood already?"

"I'm here all year around. I'm one of your neighbors."

This bothered her. She was obviously wondering what might be hidden behind words that were so simple, yet so mysterious.

"Why, I went out, as I often do, for a breath of air before I settled down to getting the children dressed. That's why you found me in such a state. When I come home, I always slip on something for around the house and..." She could not suppress a sigh of relief as she heard footsteps pause outside the door and a key turn in the lock. "My husband..." she murmured, and called out, "Boris! Come in here."

Well, Well! thought Mai-

gret, so the husband's a looker, too. Older than she is, forty-five at a guess, distinguished, well groomed, Hungarian or Czech.

"The Inspector got here just ahead of you. I was telling him you'd be right back."

Boris Krofta examined Maigret with a polite attention which seemed to mask a trace of defiance. "I beg your pardon," he murmured. No accent here; perfect French, even a trifle too perfect. "But... I do not fully understand..."

"Inspector Maigret, Judiciary Police."

"How odd. And you wished to speak to me?"

"To the employer of one Rita who takes two children out in the Place des Vosges every afternoon."

"Yes... But... you cannot mean that you have already found her, that you have recovered the jewels? I know that I must seem somewhat peculiar to you; but the coincidence is so curious that I keep trying to explain to myself... You must realize that I have just returned from the local police station where I lodged a complaint against this very Rita. I come home, I find you here, and you tell me..."

There was a nervous tension in his gestures. His wife, who had obviously no intention of leaving the two men alone, examined the Inspector with curious eyes.

"On what grounds did you lodge a complaint?"

"The jewel robbery. The girl disappeared yesterday, without giving us notice. I thought she had run off with a lover; I intended to insert an advertisement for another maid in the papers this morning. Last night we did not leave the house. This morning, while my wife was out, the idea suddenly struck me of looking in the jewel box. It was then that I understood Rita's abrupt departure; the box was empty."

"What time was it when you made this discovery?"

"Barely nine. I was in my dressing gown. As soon as I could dress, I hurried to the station."

"Meanwhile your wife returned?"

"Yes, while I was dressing... What I still do not understand is that you should arrive here this morning—"

"Pure coincidence!" Maigret murmured innocently.

"Nevertheless, I should like a few details. Did you know, this morning, that the jewels had been stolen?"

An evasive gesture from Maigret meant nothing either way, but served to augment Boris's nervousness.

"At least do me the favor of telling me the reason for your visit. I do not believe that it is a custom of the French police to invade people's homes, seat themselves comfortably, and—"

"And listen to what people tell them?" Maigret ended his sentence. "You must admit it isn't my fault. Since I got here, you've done nothing but talk about a jewel robbery which doesn't interest me in the least, since I came here because of a far more serious crime—"

"More serious?" the young woman exclaimed.

"You don't know that a crime was committed yesterday afternoon in the Place des Vosges?"

He watched her think it over, remember that Maigret had said he was a neighbor, reject the possibility of saying no, and end with a smiling murmur, "I do think I vaguely heard something of the sort in the square this morning. Some of the old ladies were gossiping..."

"I fail to see," the husband interrupted, "what concern—"

"—this case is of yours?

So far I don't know myself, but I've a notion we'll find out sooner or later. What time did Rita disappear yesterday afternoon?"

"A little after five," Boris Krofta answered without a shadow of hesitation. He turned to his wife. "That's right isn't it, Olga?"

"Exactly. She brought the children back at five. She went up to her room and I never heard her come down. Around six I went up; I was beginning to wonder why she hadn't started dinner. By then her room was empty."

"Would you please show me to her room?"

"My husband will take you up. I don't like to go out in the halls like this."

Maigret could already have found his way around the house; its plan was almost identical with that of his own. After the second floor, the staircase grew even narrower and darker before it reached the rooms under the roof. Krofta opened the third.

"This is it. I left the key in the lock."

"Your wife just said she was the one who came up here."

"Of course. But afterwards I came up, too..."

The open door revealed what could have been any

maid's room, with its iron bed, wardrobe, and washstand, save for the splendid view of the Place des Vosges from the window set in the roof.

Beside the wardrobe there was a wicker suitcase in the current style. Inside the wardrobe were dresses and underclothes.

"Your maid went off without her baggage?"

"I imagine she may have preferred to take the jewels. Their value is approximately two hundred thousand francs..."

Maigret's fat fingers felt of a little green hat, then picked up another trimmed with a yellow ribbon.

"Can you tell me how many hats your maid had?"

"I have no idea. Possibly my wife can tell you, but I doubt it."

"How long was she with you?"

"Six months."

"You found her through an ad?"

"Through an employment agency, which recommended her warmly. And I must say that her work was impeccable."

"You haven't any other servants?"

"My wife insists on looking after the children herself, so that one maid is all we need."

Besides, we live on the Côte d'Azur for much of the year; we have a gardener there and his wife helps with the housework."

Maigret was mopping his brow. His handkerchief fell to the floor and he bent over to pick it up. "That's funny..." he muttered as he stood up. He looked Krofta over from head to foot, opened his mouth, then shut it.

"You were about to say...?" Krofta asked politely.

"I wanted to ask you a question. But it's so indiscreet that you might think it was out of place..."

"Pray do."

"You insist? I wanted to ask you, just at random you understand, if... Well, the maid was very pretty: did you ever happen to have any relations with her other than those of employer and servant? Purely routine question, of course; you don't have to answer it."

Oddly enough, Krofta paused to think, suddenly more concerned than he had been. He took his time about answering, looked about him slowly, and finally sighed, "Will my answer be a matter of record?"

"There's every chance that it'll never come up."

"In that case, I prefer to confess to you that what you suggest did indeed take place."

"In your apartment?"

"No. That would be complicated — the children, you know..."

"You had dates outside?"

"Never! I would come up here now and then, and..."

"I can take it from there," Maigret smiled. "And I'm greatly satisfied by your answer. You see, I'd noticed that there was a button missing on the sleeve of your coat. Just now I found that button on the floor at the foot of the bed."

He held out the button. Krofta seized it with astonishing eagerness.

"When was the last time that it happened?" Maigret asked.

"Three or four days ago...let me think...yes, four."

"And Rita was willing?"

"Oh, yes — of course!"

"She was in love with you?"

"She gave that impression."

"You didn't know of any rival?"

"My dear Inspector! The question did not arise. If Rita had had a lover, I should never have considered him a rival. I adore my wife and my

children; in fact, I cannot understand how I let myself..."

And Maigret went on down the stairs, sighing to himself, As for you, my fine friend, I wonder if there was one minute when you weren't lying?

He stopped at the concierge's loge and sat down facing her.

She was shelling peas. "Well, did you see them? They're certainly upset about this jewel business."

"Were you in your loge yesterday at five?"

"Sure I was. And my son was right where you are, doing his homework."

"Did you see Rita bring the children home?"

"Just like I see you this minute."

"And you saw her come down a few minutes later?"

"That's what M. Krofta was asking me just now. I told him I didn't see a thing. He says it isn't possible. I must've left my loge, I wasn't paying attention—after all, so many people come and go. Just the same it seems to me I would've noticed her, because it wasn't the right time for her to be going out."

"Have you ever run into M. Krofta on the staircase to the third floor?"

"Go on—what would he be doing up there? Oh, I see... You think he'd be sniffing around the maid? You just don't know Mlle. Rita. Now they're saying she's a thief. Well, maybe she is. But when it comes to letting your employer fool around with you..."

Maigret resignedly lit his pipe and moved off.

"Well Inspectoress Maigret?" he joked affectionately as he settled down by the window. His shirt-sleeves were two brilliant splotches in the sun.

"Well, for lunch you're going to have to be satisfied with a chop and an artichoke. I even bought them ready-cooked to save time. The way these gossips go on..."

"What are they saying? Come on; let's hear the results of your investigation."

"First of all, Rita wasn't a maid!"

"How do you know?"

"All the people in the shops noticed she didn't know how to figure in sous, which means she hadn't ever done any marketing before. Then you know how it is, they'll give a servant a rebate of one sou on every franc so she'll bring all the family trade to that store. Well, the first time

the butcher offered her that, she just stared at him amazed. She did take it after that, but I'm sure it was just so she wouldn't look unusual."

"Fine! So we have a young girl of good family acting the part of a servant at the Kroftas'."

"I think she was a student. In the stores in this neighborhood you hear them talking all kinds of languages—Italian, Hungarian, Polish. It seems she used to listen as though she understood, and if anybody made a joke she'd smile."

"And how about her admirer in the Place?"

"People had noticed him, but not so much as I did. Oh, yes—one more thing: the Gastambides' maid spends a lot of her afternoons on the Place, and she says that Rita didn't know how to crochet and the only thing you could use that piece she was making for would be a dish-rag."

Maigret's small eyes smiled at his wife's intent efforts to gather her memories and express them methodically.

"And that isn't all. Before her, the Kroftas had a maid from their own country and they dismissed her because she was in the family way."

"By Krofta?"

"Oh, no! He's too much in love with his wife. They say

he's so jealous that they hardly have any company at all."

Thus all these bits of gossip, true or false, sincere or malicious, served moment by moment to alter the portraits of the characters — or perhaps to complete them.

"Since you've done such a good job," Maigret murmured, as he lit a fresh pipe, "I'm going to give you a tip: the shot that killed our bewigged and bespectacled unknown was fired from Rita's garret room. It won't be hard to prove when we get around to a reconstruction. I checked the angle of aim from there; it agrees absolutely with the position of the body and the trajectory of the bullet."

"Do you think that she . . .?"

"I don't know . . ."

He sighed and put on his collar and tie; she helped him with his coat. Half an hour later, he sank into his armchair at Headquarters and mopped his face; it was even hotter than the day before, and a storm was brewing.

An hour later, all three of Maigret's pipes were hot, the ashtray was overflowing, and the blotter was covered with words and fragments of phrases crazily intertwined. As for the Inspector, he was yawning, obviously half asleep, trying to

fix his eyes on what he had jotted down in the course of his daydream.

If Krofta had caused Rita's disappearance, the jewel theft was a sound device for averting suspicion.

That was attractive, but it proved nothing; the maid might very well have stolen her mistress's jewels.

Krofta had hesitated before saying that he had been his maid's lover.

That could mean that it was true and he was sick of it; it could also mean that it was false, that he had seen Maigret pick up the button or thought the Inspector's question concealed some sort of trap.

According to Krofta, the button had been there for four days; but the floor looked recently swept.

And why had Mme. Krofta gone for a walk so early this morning? Why had she hesitated to admit having heard of the crime, since Maigret had seen her stay so long with the gossips?

Why had Krofta asked the concierge if she'd seen Rita go out?

Private investigation on his own? Or wasn't it more likely that he knew the police would ask the question, and hoped to plant a suggestion in the woman's mind?

Suddenly Maigret rose. This whole collection of details and remarks now no longer merely irritated him, but began to oppress him painfully. Wherever he turned, it was impossible not to end with the question: where is Rita?

In flight, if she had murdered or stolen. But if she had neither murdered nor stolen, then...

A moment later he was in the chief's office, demanding brusquely, "Can you get me a blank search warrant?"

"Things aren't going so well?" the director of the P. J. smiled. Better than anyone else, he knew Maigret's moods. "All right, but you'll be discreet about it, won't you, Maigret?"

While the chief attended to the warrant, Maigret was called to the phone.

"I just thought of something!" Mme. Maigret's voice was excited and worried. "I don't know if I ought to say it over the phone..."

"Tell me anyway."

"Supposing that it isn't the one you thought who fired the shot..."

"I understand. Go on."

"Supposing, for example, it was her employer... you follow me?... I've been wondering if maybe she mightn't be still in the house? Maybe held prisoner? Maybe—dead?"

It was touching to behold Mme. Maigret hot on the trail for the first time in her life. But what the Commissioner did not admit was that she had arrived at very nearly the same point he had reached himself.

"Is that all?" he asked ironically.

"Are you making fun of me? Don't you really think—"

"In short, you think that if we institute a search of 17—"

"Just think, supposing she's still alive!"

"We'll see... And meanwhile, try to make dinner a little more substantial than lunch!"

Mme. Lécuyer, concierge of 17 bis, was assuredly a splendid woman who did her best to bring up her children properly; but she had the serious defect of getting easily rattled.

"You know how it is," she confessed, "with all these people questioning me ever since early morning, I don't know whether I'm coming or going..."

"Calm yourself, Mme. Lécuyer." Maigret had installed himself by the window, near the boy who, as on the previous evening, was doing his homework.

"I've never done any harm to anybody and—"

"Nobody's accusing you of

coming in—and having a frightful time with the staircase."

"They delivered a piano?"

"Yesterday at six thirty."

"What company?"

"I don't know. There wasn't any name on the truck. It didn't come in here in the court. It was a big packing-case and three men worked at it for a good hour."

"They took the case away?"

"No. M. Lucien came down with the men to treat them to a drink at the corner bar."

"Who's M. Lucien?"

"The man who rents that little room I was talking about. He's been up there two months—very quiet and well behaved. They say he composes music."

"He's acquainted with the Kroftas?"

"I don't think he's ever laid eyes on them."

"He was in his room yesterday at five?"

"He came in around four thirty—about when the chauffeur left."

"Did he tell you then that he was expecting a piano?"

"No, he just asked me if there was any mail for him."

"Did he get much?"

"Very little."

"Thank you, Madame Lécuyer. Just stay calm, now."

Maigret went out and gave his instructions to the two Inspectors who were patrolling

the Place des Vosges. Then he re-entered the building, hastily passing the loge for fear the concierge's berattlement might finally prove contagious.

Maigret did not stop at the first floor, nor at the second. On the third, he leaned over and made out the scratches which the piano had left on the floor. They seemed to end at the fourth door. He knocked, and heard muffled steps, like those of an old lady in bed-slippers, then a cautious murmur of, "Who is it?"

"M. Lucien, please?"

"Next door."

But at the same moment another voice stammered several words. The door opened a crack, and a fat old woman tried to make out Maigret's face in the dim light. "He isn't here right now, M. Lucien isn't. Can I take a message for him?"

Automatically Maigret leaned forward to make out the second person who was in the room.

In the half light he could catch only a cluttered glimpse of old furniture, old clothes, and frightful ornaments. Through the crack of the door came that odor peculiar to the rooms of old people.

Near the sewing machine a woman sat, stiffly, like a formal caller. Inspector Maigret experienced the greatest surprise of

his career as he recognized his own wife!

"I happened to hear that Mlle. Augustine did a little dressmaking," Mme. Maigret hastened to say. "I came to see her about that and we got to talking. . . Do you know, she has the room right next to that maid who stole the jewels!"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders, wondering what his wife was leading up to.

"The funniest thing is that her other neighbor had a piano delivered yesterday—an enormous packing-case . . ."

This time Maigret frowned, furious that his wife had, God knows how, reached the same results that he had. "Since M. Lucien isn't in, I'd better go down," he announced.

He didn't lose a minute. The two Inspectors from the Place des Vosges were posted on the staircase, not far from the Kroftas' door. A locksmith was sent for, and likewise the Commissioner from the district station.

In short order, M. Lucien's door was forced. In the room was nothing but a cheap piano, a chair, a bed, a wardrobe, and, against the wall, the packing-case in which the piano had been brought.

"Open that case!" Maigret ordered. The bets were down

now, and he was frankly scared. He dared not touch it himself, for fear of finding it empty. He pretended to fill his pipe calmly, and he tried not to tremble when his man called out, "Inspector! A woman!"

"I know."

"She's alive!"

And he repeated, "I know." If there was a woman in the case, it had to be the notorious Rita; and he was morally certain she was alive, and tightly bound and gagged. "Try to bring her to. Call a doctor."

In the hall he passed Mlle. Augustine and his wife. Mme. Maigret's smile was unique in the annals of their household—a smile to suggest the disquieting possibility that she might exchange the role of docile spouse for that of detective.

As the Inspector reached the first floor, the door of the Kroftas' apartment opened. Krofta himself was there, hyperexcited but still holding himself well in hand.

"Isn't M. Maigret here?" he demanded of the Inspectors.

"Here I am, M. Krofta."

"Somebody wants you on the telephone. From the Ministry of the Interior."

This was not quite correct. It was the chief of the P.J. "That you, Maigret? I thought I could reach you there. While you've been up to God knows what in

that house; the person whose phone you're using has put the wind up at his Embassy, and they've taken it up with the Foreign Office!"

"I get it," Maigret groaned.

"Maigret, would you believe it? A spy case! The directive is to keep everything quiet, no statements to the press. For a long time Krofta's been his country's agent in France. He's the *clearing-house* for the reports from secret agents."

Krofta had remained in a corner of the room, pale but smiling. Now as Maigret hung up, he suggested, "May I offer you any refreshment, my dear Inspector?"

"No, thank you."

"It appears that you have found my servant?"

And the Commissioner hammered out each syllable: "I found her in time—yes, M. Krofta! Good day!"

"As for me," Mme. Maigret said as she put the finishing touches to her chocolate crème, "as soon as they told me the maid didn't know how to crochet..."

"Inspectoress," her husband nodded approvingly.

"They really could convey important information that way, for hours every day? I don't know if I understand it all, but this girl, this Rita, was

really spending all her time spying on her employers?"

Maigret hated to explain a case, but under these circumstances it seemed too cruel to leave Mme. Maigret in the dark. "She was spying on spies," he grunted. "That's why, just when I can lay my hands on the whole gang, they tell me, 'Not a move! Silence and discretion'!"

"That can't be very nice for you," she sighed, as though this excused all Maigret's previous bad tempers.

"A fine case, just the same—with flashes of genius. Look at the situation: on one side the Kroftas, with all the reports for their government passing through their hands.

"On the other side, a woman and a man—Rita and the 'old' gentleman of the bench, your strange admirer. Who were they working for? That's no concern of mine now. That's up to the Deuxième Bureau; spies are their meat. Probably they were agents of another power, possibly of a different faction in their own country.

"In any event, they needed the daily centralized reports at Krofta's, and Rita got hold of them without much trouble. But how to pass them on? Spies are distrustful. The least suspicious move would ruin her.

"Hence the idea of the old gallant and the bench. And the

brilliant idea of the crocheting. Rita's hands were far more skillful than they seemed: *their jerky movements produced, not standard crochet patterns, but whole messages in Morse code!*

"Across from Rita her accomplice commits the whole business to memory. It's an example of the incredible patience of some secret agents. Whatever he learns, he has to remember word for word for hours until he spends the night typing it out in his rooms at Corbeill, near the mills.

"I wonder how Krofta caught onto their signals—two regular turns around the place, meaning all's well, and so on."

Mme. Maigret listened without daring to express the slightest opinion, she was so afraid that Maigret might stop.

"Now you know as much as I do. The Kroftas had to get rid of the man first, then take care of Rita—but not kill her; they needed to know who she was working for and how much she'd been able to transmit.

"For some time Krofta had kept a bodyguard installed in the house—M. Lucien, a first-rate shot. Krofta telephones, Lucien arrives, loses no time in going to the girl's room and using his compressed air rifle to strike down the indicated target.

"Nobody sees anything, no-

body hears anything—excepting Rita. She still has to bring the children back and play out the comedy, or she knows that the distant marksman will bring her down, too.

"She knows what will happen to her. They try to force her secrets out of her. She resists . . . so far. They threaten her with death, and order the piano for M. Lucien so that the case can be used to carry out the body.

"Krofta's already arranging his defense. He makes his complaint, announces the maid's disappearance, invents the theft of the jewels . . ."

There was silence. Evening was settling over the Place. The sky was turning blue, and the four fountains were tuning their silvery sound to the liquid silver of the moon.

"And then you took over!" Mme. Maigret said suddenly.

He looked at her dubiously. She went on, "It's so annoying, the way they kept you from pushing it through just at the best moment."

Then he burst out in unconvincing rage, "You know what's even more annoying? Finding you there in Mlle. Augustine's room! You, getting ahead of me! Though after all the case meant more to you," he smiled. "He was your admirer."

John Lutz

The Insomniacs Club

There are day people and there are night people, and as the founder and unofficial president of The Insomniacs Club pointed out: night people have certain definite advantages... a clever and "different" story...

Walter Thorn's rubber-soled shoes trod silently on the shadowed pavement. He looked about him, his slender face under the thinning brown hair its usual combination of intensity and frustration. There should be noise, he thought, as he gazed at the rows of tall brick buildings that towered into the darkness on either side of him. He was walking at the bottom of an immense stone canyon, a place of hollow echoes, but it was 3 A.M. and there simply was no noise to create echoes. The only thing stirring was Walter, and it seemed to him that his passage down North Street was like his passage through life—silent, unnoticed, meaningless.

He reached beneath his jacket and drew a pack of cigarettes from the breast pocket of his pajamas. Yes, he thought again—for he was prone to daydreams if not night

dreams—if I were a motion picture director I'd have noise here, maybe a far-off police siren, an ashcan lid falling, hollow footsteps... He flicked his lighter and slid it back into his pants pocket. He wasn't a motion picture director, of course; he was an accountant—had been for ten years, at the same firm, and for almost the same salary.

He drew on the cigarette and resumed his walk in the night. There was a dreamlike, treadmill quality to walking through the Sterling Executive Apartment project, for all the buildings were alike, neat four-story brick moderns. And you could walk six blocks in any direction from Walter's building before seeing anything different. Walter had lived here for almost a year now, at his wife's insistence. Lately he did everything at Beulah's insistence.

Walter's step faltered for a moment when he first heard them—footsteps, hollow-sounding and echoing, as he would have directed them in a movie. He walked on as before, tossing his cigarette into a small puddle of water in the street and hearing it hiss minutely and angrily as it was extinguished. He wasn't too worried, for there was a marked absence of the hoodlum element here in the Executive Apartment area.

The man turned the corner half a block up and walked toward him. Walter felt a twinge of uneasiness. As the man passed one of the evenly spaced streetlights, Walter saw that he was well dressed, but like Walter his clothes seemed to have been hastily put on.

They closed in on each other, the hollow footfalls growing louder. Walter kept his eyes averted until he was a mere ten feet from the approaching figure; then he looked up and took in the man's appearance carefully—medium height, dark hair, a bit older than Walter's 35 and better-looking, wearing a half-buttoned light raincoat against the threat of showers. Walter braced himself and got ready for anything.

"Evening," the man said, smiling pleasantly. "Can't sleep either, huh?"

That was all. He didn't even

break stride and was past Walter before he could think of a reply.

Walter let out his breath in relief. Sure! In a big group of buildings like this there probably were plenty of people who couldn't sleep, maybe even a few insomniacs in each building. And probably a lot of them walked at night just like Walter. It was a common thing, and so it was not so uncommon that they should meet occasionally in the early morning hours. Habit, as well as good sense, would tend to make them confine their pacing to the perfectly squared, well-lighted streets of the apartment area rather than stray out into one of the surrounding poorer neighborhoods. Walter didn't have a monopoly on insomnia.

Walter's deduction turned out to be right, for he happened to meet the same man the next night on East Street. This time Walter nodded pleasantly as they passed. Then the night came when the man asked Walter for a light, and they struck up a conversation and introduced each other.

The man's name was Alan Kirkland, and it turned out he lived three blocks from Walter in Executive 20. All the apartment buildings were numbered, from 1 through 60, and they all rented for the same

exorbitant amount, with the exception of Executive 1, which rented for more. Prestige.

It turned out that this necessity for prestige had caused Kirkland, like Walter, to begin living at the very limit of his means. But now there were unexpected bills to pay, and Kirkland couldn't sleep.

It seemed to Walter, as their acquaintance progressed, that Kirkland was leading up to something. And one cool night when they ceased their aimless walking to sit on a hard bus-stop bench, Walter got an inkling of what that something was.

"Have you ever wondered, Walter," Kirkland asked as he leisurely packed his briar pipe, "how many insomniacs like you and me there are in a big project like this?"

"Often," Walter said.

"And as you know, Walter, lots of us, when we can't sleep, *really* can't sleep—we almost have to get outside and walk. You know there are a lot of people out walking the streets in the early morning, more than most people think. You go stir crazy otherwise."

"Indeed you do," Walter said, watching Kirkland fire up the briar, noticing little flecks of gray shimmering in the dark hair on his temples.

Kirkland flicked the match

away. "The fact is, Walter, a number of us early-morning insomniacs have gotten together to form a sort of club."

"Club?" Walter asked. "What do you do?"

"Why, we meet, Walter. Like all clubs, we meet."

"That's interesting," Walter said. "The Insomniacs Club."

Kirkland sat quietly puffing on his pipe, volunteering nothing more. It was just like him to catch the conversational ball and tuck it in his pocket.

"How, uh, many are there in your club?" Walter asked.

"Counting me," Kirkland said, "nine. Six men and three women."

Women, Walter thought with a sudden flush. He had a wild notion of what Kirkland was driving at. Too wild a notion, he told himself, a little bit ashamed. He'd been faithful to Beulah for the eleven years of their marriage. Though from time to time he couldn't help asking himself why.

Kirkland swiveled his body on the bench to face Walter. "Have you considered," he asked in a confidential tone, "that there are certain advantages to friendships formed after midnight? Though we members of the club know one another, we know little about one another except for our common bond of insomnia. And more

importantly, no one, none of the day people, connect us with one another—to them we are perfect strangers."

Walter swallowed. "You mentioned certain advantages?"

Kirkland smiled. "I named them, Walter, I named them. It's up to us to use them."

"But how?"

Kirkland placed a hand on Walter's shoulder, somehow making Walter feel uncomfortable. "Suppose you come along to our meeting tomorrow night?" Kirkland asked through teeth that clenched the pipe-stem. "It isn't anyone that we invite, you know. The membership is limited."

Walter considered asking why but thought better of it. He fought down his hesitancy and for once decided to act on impulse. "I'm honored," he said, and then in an attempt at a joke added, "After all, I haven't much else to do."

Kirkland's hand tightened on his shoulder. "You'd be surprised, Walter." He smiled broadly around the pipe and stood up. "I'll meet you here tomorrow night—say at three?"

"Fine," Walter said, getting to his feet.

They parted, both men trying to beat the dawn home.

The next night Kirkland took Walter to the meeting in

an apartment of a bachelor member of the club, a very fat man named Leon Stubbs. By 3:15 A.M. they were all there, sitting as comfortably as possible on Stubbs's modern furniture and sipping his liquor. Walter had been given a particularly strong martini.

"I suppose we should get the meeting under way," Kirkland said, standing and walking to a part of the room where he was visible to everyone. He seemed to be the unofficial president of the club. Walter glanced nervously around at the club members, whom he'd been introduced to and half of whose names he'd already forgotten. For a fleeting moment he wondered if he could be home in bed dreaming.

"Now," Kirkland went on, his voice like a pinch to Walter's idle thought, "we have a new candidate for membership in the person of Walter Thorn. I've known Walter fairly long and I've talked to him considerably of many personal matters. I think he's the man to make our final member."

Walter noticed that the members were paying rapt attention. The men, some of them with pajama cuffs showing beneath trousers or shirts, sat as if at a business meeting. The women wore the look that Beulah had when she was

talking long distance to her sister in Washington. Walter had been disappointed to find that two of the women were quite average-looking, but the other, a Miss Morganford, was a somewhat more promising blonde. Miss Morganford, wearing dark slacks and bedroom slippers, was sitting next to Walter on the sofa.

"If you recommend him, Alan," Stubbs said, "I don't think we'll find much fault with him."

"That's right," a fortyish woman with horn-rimmed glasses said. "After all, it was Mr. Kirkland who brought us together."

Kirkland produced his briar pipe from a pocket and stood for a moment thoughtfully rolling it between thumb and forefinger. "I propose that we acquaint Walter with the purpose of our club and let him decide whether or not he wishes to join. Take my word that he's an honorable man, and if he chooses not to join us I'm sure he'll remain silent. Anyway, things should be got into operation as soon as possible. For some of us the need is quite pressing and further delay would be foolish."

Walter heard some of the members exhale loudly and a tall red-headed man shifted uncomfortably.

"Well?" Kirkland asked.

The members murmured assent.

Kirkland smiled and addressed himself to Walter. "The fact is, Walter, like all of us here you have an increasing need for money; you're bogged down, bored with your work, unhappy, not getting any younger. And if it isn't a need for money that's robbing you of your sleep, it's something that can be alleviated by money. Life has become nothing more than a monotonous struggle."

Walter bowed his head uneasily.

Miss Morganford touched his knee. "It doesn't hurt to admit it," she said in an understanding voice.

"All right," Walter said softly, "I admit it."

"So much I've learned from our conversations, Walter," Kirkland said more to the members than to Walter. "And I want you to know that you're among friends here."

Walter forced a smile. "Then the purpose of the club is sort of group therapy?"

Leon Stubbs chuckled, but Kirkland pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"In a way," Kirkland said, "only we intend to do something specific about our common problem."

"But what?"

it." Now Kirk-briar and puffed miniature clouds of smoke into the room. "As I said before, Walter, there are certain advantages to after-midnight friendships." He waved the pipe to take in all the occupants of the room. "We know one another, trust one another, but to the daytime world there is nothing to connect any of us." His eyes narrowed behind the smoke. "Here is a fact that can be used to our advantage." He focused his narrow eyes on Walter. "Tell me, does your wife know when you leave the apartment at night?"

"I've mentioned it sometimes," Walter said, "but usually she doesn't. She sleeps like a log."

"It's a curious fact," Kirkland said, "that the mates and family members of most insomniacs do sleep like logs. It reduces the risk of our plan to an absolute minimum."

"But just what is the plan?" Walter asked, noticing that the back of Miss Morganford's hand still rested against his leg.

Kirkland looked at him with a sardonic but respectful smile. "It's illegal—you should know that before we go further."

Walter put his hands on his knees as if to stand. "You'd better not go any further," he said nervously. "I don't want to make sense,"

be responsible for hurting anyone."

"Oh, wait," Miss Morganford said pleadingly. "At least hear us out. I'm sure you'll change your mind. I wouldn't hurt anyone either."

"No one will be hurt," Kirkland said reassuringly. "Only some big insurance companies, and for amounts that, while substantial to us, they'll hardly miss."

Walter sat back. "Then the crime is stealing."

Kirkland nodded.

"From who?"

"Why, from each other. That's why there's no risk; the victims will cooperate."

"I don't understand," Walter said as Stubbs poured him another ready-mix martini.

"Look," Kirkland said, brandishing the briar pipe, "suppose one of us here in this room burglarizes another's apartment at a set time when it's perfectly safe? Suppose every one of us here in this room burglarizes another's apartment? None of us are known to be acquainted. To the police it will simply look like ten unconnected crimes pulled off by the same thief, because we'll use the same *Modus operandi* each time. They'll think a professional burglar is working this area."

THE INSOMNIACS CLUB

said, sipping his drink. "And the insurance—"

"Exactly! Each of us has some heavily insured jewelry. When it's stolen we'll each collect the insurance money. I've arranged for the jewels to be sold to a reliable fence, and the proceeds will be evenly split among us." He grinned. "Pays better than an accountant's job, Walter, and it's just as safe—safer. Several insurance companies will be involved, so they'll pay off and will hardly bother to check. And you'll never have to worry about anyone here talking, because we'll all be equally guilty—and we'll all find it equally profitable."

Walter finished his drink slowly. "It *does* sound fool-proof—"

"You think about it, Walter," Kirkland said, still smiling. "I'm sure we can rely on your silence in the meantime. Heck, I'll bet you wouldn't want Beulah even to know you were here."

"No," Walter said shakily, "I wouldn't. Yes, I will think about it."

The club members, in a noticeably more relaxed mood, lapsed into amiable chatter as another round of drinks was served by Stubbs, and before the sun came up, the meeting was adjourned.

Walter thought the matter over for a week. Each night while walking the streets he would just happen to run into Kirkland and his persuasiveness, and Miss Morganford even broke the rules of the club to telephone him and personally urge him to join. It was no wonder that at the next meeting of The Insomniacs Club, Walter became a member and was told the details of the plan.

He was shown how the lock on Stubbs's front door could easily be slipped with a piece of celluloid, and all Executive Apartment locks were of the same type. A piece of celluloid would be dropped at the scene of the first burglary to establish the method of entry, but from then on the doors would simply be left unlocked. On each robbery the same pair of ribbed gloves with a distinctive identifying mark on the forefinger would be used. The future burglars were all reminded to leave glove prints.

An irregular schedule covering five weeks was worked out, with the apartments of successive victims arranged in an unsymmetrical and unpredictable pattern. Walter's apartment was to be robbed last because he'd just increased his insurance and a five-week interval would be least suspicious. Each victim

told the time of night or early morning most convenient for the crime to be safely committed and made sure his or her future burglar knew exactly where every member of the family slept and exactly where the jewels were kept. The victim was to mess things up a bit before retiring for the night, so the burglar could get in and out quietly and in a hurry.

As for the choice of burglar and victim, each member would be a burglar the crime before he himself would be victimized. Thus before any attention at all was cast on him he would have the previous crime's loot safely hidden away outside the apartment project. He would then leave the ribbed gloves in an agreed-on spot in *his* apartment for his burglar to slip on as soon as he wiped off the doorknob and entered. This way there was no chance of anyone being caught on the street before a burglary with the incriminating gloves, for they would be waiting conveniently at the scene of each crime.

And with the loot hidden in nine different spots—nine because it would be safer not to have the necessary first victim commit a later robbery—there would be no chance of anyone absconding with the jewels; so when they did sleep, the club members would rest easier. It was a good plan.

would all be finished before the police had even a chance to get a whiff of anything suspicious. On a date a few weeks after the last burglary, The Insomniacs Club would meet again, the loot would be given to Kirkland and, on his insistence, two elected club members would go with him that morning to sell it and hold the money. At a meeting the next night the small fortune would be divided in equal shares.

Everyone made sure of his instructions, and until the future wave of jewel thefts that was to sweep over the Executive Apartments had ended, club meetings were postponed.

Things seemed to progress with incredible smoothness. Three days after the last club meeting Walter read on page 8 of the newspaper how \$10,000 worth of jewelry had been stolen from Miss Mary Gordon, a resident of the Sterling Executive Apartments. Walter smiled to himself as he sat across the table from Beulah and read this item. He knew that a tall redheaded man named Fenwick had committed that robbery, and he knew that in two nights Miss Morganford would walk into Fenwick's apartment, slip on the same gloves, and relieve the Fenwicks of their jewelry. Then, four

nights later, it would be Miss Morganford's turn to be robbed. And eventually—here Walter did smile behind the paper—it would be his, Walter Thorn's, turn.

The plan seemed to be working so flawlessly that Walter actually looked forward to his turn with delicious anticipation. On September 11th at 2:15 A.M. he was to walk into Alan Kirkland's apartment, slip on the gloves he'd find under the entrance-hall throw rug, and walk to the door of the master bedroom—Walter knew where this was because his apartment was laid out the same way. Kirkland, who would already have displaced things in the apartment while his wife was sleeping, would be lying next to his soundly sleeping mate and actually watching as Walter walked to the top-left drawer of the triple dresser and quietly emptied Mrs. Kirkland's jewelry box. Then, a scant two minutes after he'd entered, Walter would make his exit, touching things here and there to leave the distinctive glove prints.

As Walter waited his turn, he watched the newspaper stories on the robberies move through editorials and lingerie advertisements toward the front page. And as more robberies occurred, police protection in the

apartment project increased. This meant little or nothing, for the police were pathetically undermanned and the Executive Apartment area was large. Only once during a late night walk did Walter see a police car cruise by, and then it was two blocks away. Getting in and out of the apartment buildings unseen posed no problem. In fact, so helpless were the police that they had the newspapers explain the method of entry in the rash of jewel thefts and urged all citizens of the area to install special locks on their doors. And some citizens did—but not the citizens who counted.

As Walter knew it eventually would, the early morning of September 11th came to pass, and he found himself walking silently down East Street on his rubber soles toward Kirkland's apartment in Executive 20. The warm night was quiet and the street was empty, but still Walter felt an indefinable qualm, an unexpected queasiness at what he was about to do.

He shook this feeling off as he stepped down from the curb and crossed a deserted side street. He made himself think of how things would be after the burglary, picturing himself on Stubbs's sofa sitting next to Miss Morganford, each of them

drinking a martini and counting their part of the proceeds.

Then he was in the deep shadow of Kirkland's apartment building. Glancing up and down the dark street to make sure he was unobserved, he breathed deeply and casually entered, as if he lived there. He walked swiftly up the marble stairs and down the soundproofed hall, and before he knew it he was standing trembling in the Kirklands' entrance hall, just inside the front door.

Walter reopened the front door a crack and wiped the knob clean of his own prints with a handkerchief, closed the door again, then got out his small penlight, and found and put on the gloves. He moved across the deep carpet into the Kirklands' living room.

Walter flashed the penlight beam about as he moved silently toward the master bedroom. Kirland had done his job, opening drawers, tilting picture frames, overturning lamps. And he'd done it all with the telltale gloves, so even if by some wild quirk Walter was seen entering and leaving the building it would mean nothing, for the thief would have had to spend at least twenty minutes to search so thoroughly before finding the jewels. Walter would be gone in less than two minutes.

He entered the bedroom cautiously, seeing the two figures on the double bed. The drapes were partly open and there was enough light in the room to get the jewels without the aid of the penlight. Walter held his breath, moved to the correct open dresser drawer, and reached inside. His hand closed on the jewels in the open box and he began to stuff his pockets.

"What is it, dear?"

The woman's voice cut through Walter's body like a blade of ice.

"What the hell?" Kirkland's voice said.

There was a rustling movement on the bed behind Walter, then an ear-shattering scream, long and loud. A string of pearls broke in his clenched hand and the pearls went bouncing about the room. "Oh, good Lord," Walter moaned aloud, and he was out of the bedroom and running.

He hit the apartment door and fumbled it open, then he was dashing down the hall toward the stairs. There was light, and voices around him. A door opened down the hall and a small bald man stuck his head out, shutting the door partway and peering out curiously at Walter as he flew past, like a man watching a mad dog, ready to slam the door if it veered in

his direction. Walter stumbled down the marble stairs, crashed into the front door, and was out in the street.

Windows were now lit up and sirens were wailing as he ran down East Street.

"Stop him!" Kirkland shouted—and that's when Walter knew.

It became clearer to him with every jarring step, with every stab of pain in his ribs. He'd been chosen to make the pattern complete. The robberies wouldn't be investigated further by the police because the thief would already have been apprehended. Naturally the thief would concoct some fantastic story rather than say where he'd sold the jewels and hidden or spent the money; so the insurance companies would take their losses and decide the jewelry had vanished in the mysterious channels of the underworld. And to prove Walter's guilt beyond question, after his arrest the robberies would stop.

A siren screamed unbelievably loud and a police car suddenly screeched to a rocky halt directly in front of Walter. He tried to spin on his heel but he tripped and fell sobbing on the suddenly bright pavement. He heard two more cars squeal

to a stop and headlight beams blinded him.

Iron-strong hands yanked Walter to his feet and he was leaned against the rough brick wall of Executive 16 and expertly searched. They collected the evidence—the stolen jewelry and the ribbed gloves. He could hear them asking him at the station, "Where were you on this night and that night?" "I go out walking," he'd answer; "I have insomnia." He could hear them laughing.

His arm twisted behind him, he was led back up the street toward a waiting patrol wagon. He could feel hundreds of eyes on him as he lowered his head in defeat and shame. "Alan—" he pleaded to Kirkland as he was led past the crowd of onlookers, but it was natural that the thief would case his future jobs and know his victims' names. The shame cut deeper as he was pushed up into the back of the patrol wagon.

But to Walter the worst part of all was when the door of the patrol wagon was slammed shut. Then for the first time he was plagued by the vision of endless future nights—nights when he would wake up perspiring in a ten-by-ten cell, and there would be no place to go.

Michael Arlen

Gay Falcon

You've probably seen movie adventures of the Falcon on TV's Late or Late Late Show—old films "based on the character created by Michael Arlen." (Some of the screenplays were written by Craig Rice and Stuart Palmer.) Well, here's the novelet that started the whole thing. So far as your Editor has been able to find out, it's the one and only Gay Falcon story that Michael Arlen ever wrote. Thus, from a single story a long saga can grow . . .

One curious point: it was rare indeed for any story, long or short, to come off the old Hollywood assembly line without suffering a B-change, rich and strange. Michael Arlen's "Gay Falcon" proved no exception to the cinematic rule. In the original version, as you will see, Gay Falcon is a hardboiled, sardonic detective—not the man, as Mr. Arlen told us, "who would have succeeded in politics, where charm of manner is said to be an advantage." In the movie "adaptations," Gay Falcon emerged, picture after picture, as a charming and romantic rogue! Oh, well, life is real, life is earnest . . .

Detective: GAY FALCON

Now of this man who called himself Gay Falcon many tales are told, and this is one of them.

It is told how, late one night not long ago, a pretty lady awoke to find a man in her bedroom, and how this outrage on her privacy started a train of most peculiar events which finally ended in as sensational a

murder as you could wish to see.

But let us take one thing at a time.

Her dreamless sleep so rudely shattered, the pretty lady blinked in the sudden light which the intruder, behaving in a manner quite unsuitable in a decent burglar, had switched on.

"What is it?" she cried.
"What do you want?"

She was surprised, not frightened. It took more than a man to frighten this pretty lady, as many a man had found. Flinging her bed-jacket about her shoulders, her famous blue eyes, now so entirely devoid of the desire to please that photographers would have recognized her only with difficulty, regarded the stranger with surprise and contempt. But such treatment appeared only to nourish his disagreeable assurance.

"Lady, be good," he said.
"Don't ring. Don't telephone."

It should be pointed out that the tall intruder must indeed have lacked all sensibility, for even when addressing the lady he did not remove his hat, which was of weathered felt, the colour of rain on Piccadilly, and worn at an angle over his left eye which might have been called debonair anywhere but in a lady's bedroom.

"You are easy to look at," he said thoughtfully, "even without the make-up. Easy on the eye."

While these compliments were vulgar and ill-timed, they were deserved in full measure. The lady made a very pretty picture. Her bed-jacket matched her bed-spread, which was of white satin fringed with white

ermine, while everything about her—hair, eyes, features, complexion—was of the very best and most attractive quality obtainable for women over twenty-five but under thirty.

But this lady's beauty can need no description when it is revealed that her name was Mrs. Temple, Diana Temple, of London, Paris, and New York, one of the ten or maybe ten thousand best-dressed women in the world, excluding China and the Solomon Islands.

Of the fellow Temple, her husband, nothing can be said since nothing is known, apart from the fact that he had a brother. Once upon a time this brother had run away to sea, while Temple had married Diana, and neither was ever heard of again.

But the rude intruder made no attempt to conceal the fact that Diana Temple was no more to him than just another woman. As she swiftly stretched out a hand to her bedside table, he more swiftly put the telephone and bell-push out of her reach.

"Lady, be calm," he said. "This is the one occasion when Diana Temple is not going to do what she likes with a man. I don't want to get tough with you—so be good, my pretty."

Her lovely eyes widened with frank curiosity as she

stared up at the man's dark saturnine face. He was tall, his clothes were as you like it for an old suit casually worn, his face was long and lean and dark, and his eyes were deep hard shadows.

"You are a strange burglar, I think," she said, "and somehow . . ."

"Somehow?" he said, and flicked off his hat.

"Why," she cried, "I've met you before!"

"Yes," he said. "We slept together through Lady Taura's dinner-party two weeks ago."

"We danced together, too," she said. "I remember—Gay Falcon! Your name is Gay Falcon."

"I have others, equally improbable."

"Tell me frankly, Mr. Falcon—do you enjoy being such a contemptible beast?"

"I enjoy the company of a woman of courage, Mrs. Temple. It relieves me that you are going to be robbed."

When she smiled you saw at once why men, who were prudent with their wives, pressed pearls and diamonds on Diana Temple.

"But," she smiled, "I am not going to be robbed. How silly of you to be so recognizable, Mr. Falcon. You *can* rob me, of course. But you will be arrested tomorrow."

"We shall see," said the man who called himself Gay Falcon. "Don't you remember something else about Lady Taura's party apart from the fact that we danced together?"

"Dear me," she said, staring, "her emerald! Of course—her lovely emerald—which was found to be missing next morning." She measured the man with a cold and detached curiosity which might have mortified a less assured scoundrel. "You are a clever thief."

"It was nice work, certainly. Of course, the stone is not worth the sum Lady Taura will collect from the insurance in due course—but still, it was nice work."

"I am glad you are pleased, Mr. Falcon. It must be pleasant to make such a success of one's chosen profession."

"I haven't said I stole it, Mrs. Temple."

The saturnine stranger unsmilingly surveyed the spacious bedroom.

Mrs. Temple lost nothing of her poise when she saw that the thief's eyes had come to rest on her dressing-table. There, on a small tray of crimson velvet, like bright fruit fallen from the trees of an ambitious maiden's dreams, lay the necklace of rubies and bracelets of rubies and clips of rubies that she had worn at dinner.

"You won't really mind my taking those," he said, "since they are so well insured."

"Since you know so much, Mr. Falcon, you will know that the insurance cannot repay me for their romantic and sentimental value."

The man glanced at her with a queer cold smile, and Mrs. Temple felt really uneasy for the first time.

"In that case," he said, "I won't take them. Observe my big heart."

She heard herself, with infinite surprise, laughing unsteadily.

"Then you must go away empty-handed, Mr. Falcon, for everything else is at my bank."

The tall man's eyes had come to rest on the only picture in the austere room. This was a small Italian primitive, the colour still bright on the cracked wood, of the Virgin Mary with the Child, and it was set into the wall just beside the bed behind the bedside table.

And as the man approached the primitive set into the wall, Mrs. Temple, the calm and remote Mrs. Temple, stared at him with suddenly uncontrollable terror.

"Oh, no!" she whispered. "No—please!"

"I fancy," he said, reaching out a hand past the telephone

to the lower right corner of the primitive, "I fancy, Mrs. Temple, that you won't tell the police about what I am going to do now."

She fought him with all her strength. Quite silently, but for bitter little sighs of feminine despair, her lovely features distorted with fear, she beat her arms frantically against him in a vain attempt to prevent him from opening the little secret safe in the wall.

But when she had done all she could, she regained her practised dignity. She did not look to see what he was taking from the secret safe. She lay very still and stared up at the ceiling with wide open eyes that seemed to be counting some ghosts that walked there.

He looked back at her from the door, and was about to say something. Then he saw how she lay still and looked to be counting ghosts that walked across the ceiling, and he went out without a word.

She was the most frightened woman he had ever seen, and it was interesting to wonder why, since it was not of him that she was so frightened.

On the following morning the activities of the man who called himself Gay Falcon were surprising in a simple burglar.

Passing through the imposing

doors of a very large new building on Pall Mall, known to all the world as the headquarters of Universal & Allied Assurance, he was immediately taken up to the handsome boardroom. It was just one minute after noon.

Nine gentlemen appeared to have been awaiting his entrance. Of these a few were directors of Universal & Allied, while others represented important firms of underwriters and assessors. The sulky features of the ninth gentleman were recognizable to readers of popular newspapers as being those of Chief-Inspector Poss of Scotland Yard. As he sat at the boardtable, he made no secret of the fact that he disapproved strongly of his present situation and was quite unprepared to change his mind in the near future.

The man called Falcon had with him a small but evidently well-filled leather satchel. He slid this with an expert shove down the length of the long table to the handsome gray-haired gentleman who sat at its head.

"There you are, Mr. Hammersley. In the last few years your people and other underwriters have paid out close on £100,000 in claims on the lost or stolen jewellery represented by that little lot."

It was only Chief-Inspector

Poss who examined the jewellery with any degree of close attention. The others merely glanced at it, some with inexpert eyes, while their interest was centered on the tall lean figure of Falcon.

"If that is the case," said Mr. Hammersley, "as it very probably is, your commission of five per cent will come to £5,000, which is very nice money, Mr. Falcon."

"When you hired me, Mr. Hammersley, did you think you were hiring a nursemaid?"

"Oh, we are not complaining," said a large, smiling, ruddy man.

"Thank you very much," said Gay Falcon. It was obvious that he was not a man who would have succeeded in politics, where charm of manner is said to be an advantage.

"And now," said the smiling, ruddy man, "perhaps we can hear how you have managed to succeed so quickly where the police have so consistently failed."

Falcon's hard unsmiling eyes flicked over the Chief-Inspector who, bent over the table, was still examining the jewellery. Then his gaze went back to the large ruddy man with the twinkling blue eyes. This was Mr. Harvey Morgan, always known as "Chappie" Morgan, a very successful financier and

popular sportsman. It was apparent from Falcon's expression that he thought more amiably of Chappie Morgan than of his associates.

"Well, what's your story?" said handsome Mr. Hammersley sharply.

"My father was a dentist in Leicester, and my mother died when I was a child. Shortly afterwards I decided to leave home and become an engine-driver, but owing to—"

"We asked you, Mr. Falcon, for your story about this recovered jewellery."

Chappie Morgan gave a loud bark of laughter.

"Listen, Hammersley," said the man called Falcon, "you people hired me because the police had failed to justify reasonable suspicions that underwriters were being cleverly robbed. I have confirmed your suspicions and returned part of the jewellery. I am not a policeman. I am not a story-teller. I am a man who makes a living by keeping his mouth shut. The money due to me should be paid into my account at Barclays Bank, Piccadilly Branch."

Chief-Inspector Poss looked across the table very steadily:

"That won't do, Falcon."

"Mister Falcon, Chief-Inspector. What won't do?"

"Gentlemen," said the Chief-

Inspector to the board, "I told you a month ago that it was highly irregular to give a free hand in this matter to a man like this man Falcon—"

"Mr. Flatfoot," said Gay Falcon, "one more crack from you and I shall give the whole story to the newspapers, and then you and your efficient detectives will be looking for jobs as film-extras."

"Better be a good boy, Poss," grinned Chappie Morgan.

"I am not easily frightened, gentlemen. But now you will appreciate why I warned you against engaging *Mister Falcon*. This stuff is stolen jewellery, some of it very famous jewellery. And we know for a fact that not one little bit of it has passed through the hands of any fence in England. You are taking a grave risk, gentlemen. If we do not hear from this man Falcon how he has managed to succeed where the police have failed, you share with him the risk of being charged with aiding and abetting a receiver of stolen jewellery."

"Quit kidding," said Falcon. "It's their property, isn't it, since they have paid all claims on it? Try arresting them for receiving back their own property, and see how you like it."

"But you can be charged, *Mister Falcon*, for all sorts of misdemeanours, I make no

doubt. Now behave yourself and help the police by telling me how you recovered this property."

"Brains," said Falcon. "Naughty boy, where are yours?"

The Chief-Inspector's grim face had reddened, and he was about to retort in a manner unworthy of the high traditions of Scotland Yard, when Mr. Hammersley intervened with practised authority.

"I am afraid, Chief-Inspector, that while we must agree with you that Mr. Falcon's attitude is highly irregular, we cannot encourage you to take any action against him. It was with your knowledge that we engaged him to recover this jewellery, which the police had failed to find for two years."

"And now," said Chappie Morgan, "Scotland Yard is angry because Falcon won't give away his little secret."

"The law," said Chief-Inspector Poss, with commendable restraint, "does not acknowledge secrets in respect of other people's stolen property. This man Falcon's position requires investigation." He picked up a jewel from amongst the heap on the table. "Now here is the famous Taura emerald, which Lady Taura reported as stolen or missing two weeks ago—"

"Insured at £9,000," said someone.

"Yes. And here it is recovered. But how? It was stolen at or after a ball given by Lady Taura. And you were there, *Mister Falcon*."

"Does the fact that I dance better than you do, Chief-Inspector, mean that I am a criminal? Now let me tell you all something. These insurance claims for lost and stolen jewellery from society people over the last two years and more have been part of a very clever racket. I want to find out who is behind this racket. When I do, I'll maybe talk. In fact, I promise to talk. Good day to you, gentlemen. Good day, Chief-Inspector."

"You are asking for trouble, Falcon. Remember, there is an unsolved murder somewhere behind these thefts—that of Stella Bowman last year. I warn you again, Falcon."

"It's years and years, Chief-Inspector, since I burst out crying because a policeman didn't like me."

Now it is on record that no well-known beauty can long survive the rigorous life of being a well-known beauty day in and day out if she does not acquire the courageous gift of being able to "put off" engagements at more or less the last minute.

Mrs. X regrets that she is unable to dine because she has a headache and is going to bed with a boiled egg. Mrs. X regrets that she cannot lunch today because her doctor has forbidden her to go out.

They always sound like lies. They usually are lies, but people are eager to forgive lies who will find the truth intolerable. For while it is true that people do not like to be "put off," it is also true that those people who are by nature liable to be "put off" invariably live to fight another day for yet another engagement with the same inconsiderate guest.

Therefore Mrs. Temple had little hesitation, that very afternoon, in telephoning to Lady Soda's house and regretting that she could not dine that evening with Sir Theodore and Lady Soda owing to this and that.

The fact that she was dining with the man who called himself Gay Falcon, who had telephoned that afternoon in the most casual manner imaginable, was nobody's business but her own. Anyway, Mrs. Temple knew, for she was a student of worldliness in all its nasty little niceties, that Sir Theodore and Lady Soda would inevitably invite her again.

She met Mr. Falcon at a small restaurant near Jermyn

Street which had recently become well known to thinking men of the wealthier sort for its serious attitude in matters of importance. As always, she wore her slender cool beauty with that faint air of detached amusement which is the natural gift of women born to enchant others but never to deceive themselves.

Mr. Falcon had taken care they should not be overheard by engaging a corner table. The black-and-white effect of his dinner-jacket emphasized his dark saturnine face and deep eyes and graying hair. It also became apparent to a close observer that he knew how to laugh at many things.

She said: "Dear me, for an ugly man you are really quite good-looking."

"Just wait," he said, "till you get the low-down on my kind heart as well, and then you will wonder where I have been all your life. I haven't ordered any dinner, since you never know what a pretty woman will eat, if at all. Have some melon. Have some caviare. Have a steak and onions. Have some grouse. Diana Temple, you are a very pretty woman. Have what you like."

"How nice it is," she said, over dinner, "to be with someone with whom I don't have to pretend anything. Dear

me, I am a thief. I am a bad woman. Now you know about me—what about you? What are you? Who are you?"

"And why," he smiled darkly, "did I do to you what I did last night?"

"Yes, why?"

"Diana Temple, I am a man who has done many things. I have been a soldier, a gambler, a secret agent, an airplane salesman, a white hunter, a purser, a husband, a co-respondent, a war-correspondent, a long-distance swimmer, a professional dancer, a good salmon-fisherman. I have no rheumatism, no patience, and no money. For further information apply to Scotland Yard for free booklet on the man called Gay Falcon."

"No money? Then how do you make a living?"

"By engaging in dangerous enterprises—and I've not been killed—yet."

"But I am not a dangerous enterprise, Mr. Falcon. Why did you engage yourself in my business?"

"Mrs. Temple, some more grouse?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Falcon."

"Then just one more potato? What is one more potato to a figure like yours? Have I told you that I was once married to a woman in New York with a figure just like yours, but—"

She said: "Mr. Falcon, why did you, who engage in dangerous enterprises, pick on me?"

Over the rim of his wine-glass his sardonic eyes, now unsmiling, regarded her fair face intently. Her gaze did not waver, but that meant little to a man who knew from experience that liars and thieves and killers can look you straighter in the eyes than many an honest man.

"Then I shall ask you a question, too," he said. "Why were you so infernally frightened last night?"

"Frightened?" She smiled with a wavering uncertainty that made her beauty poignant. "But isn't it natural—when a strange man bursts into a woman's—"

"You were not," he pointed out, "frightened of me."

Her eyes fell slowly, and she seemed to be counting the little bright bubbles in her wine-glass.

"There is someone in your life, Diana Temple, of whom you are very frightened. For you love life, and you are frightened for your life. And it is because I am out to find and catch that someone, that this is a dangerous enterprise."

Very still, her eyes grave and absorbed, she said nothing. Then she shivered a very little. She did not look at him.

"I don't want," she whis-

pered to the last bursting bubble in her glass, "to die."

"It would be a pity, I agree. Let me tell you a story, Mrs. Temple. There are a number of wealthy and respectable women in this world who are now and then in need of hard cash. Perhaps they have lost too much at racing or at cards, or owe their brokers more than they can pay. Perhaps husbands or trustees simply will not pay up again.

"They are not women who would willingly do anything criminal. Looking around for money, they see only their jewellery. They think of selling a ring or bracelet, but if they try to sell to a well-known jeweller, they fear their husbands will find out or their credit will be damaged, and from an obscure merchant they can hope only for a very poor bargain.

"There is the insurance. Fine jewels belonging to individuals are invariably insured at their replaceable value and not at what you or I could sell them for at second-hand. Therefore, they will get very much more from the insurance than from selling the stuff, even if they knew how.

"But the very fact that insurance companies can exist and thrive is due to something fundamental in human nature—

that the vast majority of people are honest, that a small number would be faintly dishonest if not frightened of the law, while only a very small percentage are really dishonest.

"So the respectable women I speak of would not dream of cheating the underwriters by throwing a ruby into a lake, while some would like to but daren't for fear of breaking down when answering the searching questions of practised investigators.

"Then one day along comes the answer to their troubles. Let us say that a Mrs. de Courcy Fish, well known to readers of unimportant papers as an important person, owes her bookmaker a thousand quid. She daren't tell her old man, because he is hard up himself and she has promised never to gamble again. Her bookmaker is getting nasty, like in the story-books. And then one day a voice on the telephone tells her just what to do to raise the wind.

"'Mrs. de Snooks Fish,' says the voice, 'don't worry about your debts. Yes, I know all about you. All you have to do is to claim the £1,500 insurance on that ruby ring you have lost.'

"'My ruby!' she cries. 'But I haven't lost it. I've never lost anything.'

"Oh yes, you have, madam. You have lost your ruby tomorrow night at Delsarto's, where you and your husband have supper so often after the theatre. You were sitting—tomorrow night—at your usual table, and somehow owing to a slight scratch on your finger your ring was bothering you. So you put it, or you thought you did, beside your plate and—really very stupidly—forgot it there for a few minutes while you got up to dance. Or if your husband didn't want to dance tomorrow night you went to powder your nose. Anyway, some ten minutes or so after you got back, you missed the ring, but being uncertain whether you really had taken it off or whether it had dropped off your finger while dancing and so on and forgot this talk and I am so sorry you have lost your ruby tomorrow night and good day to you, madam."

"That, Diana Temple, is more or less how this insurance racket started. One clever thing about it was that the people who put in claims for lost or stolen jewellery had never or very seldom lost anything before, and so were and are rated as first-class risks, and another clever thing was that the women concerned really did delude themselves that they really had lost or mislaid or

dropped the stuff, as indeed they had, in one way."

"That is my story, Diana Temple—and your story, too."

Watching her, he did not help her light her cigarette. Carefully, she blew out the match, and for a long minute stared at its burnt tip.

She said: "How did you find me out, Gay Falcon?"

"I have been interested in you for some time. I wondered how you had enough money to live and dress as you do, since your husband disappeared—"

"My uncle—" she said.

"My uncle my eye, beautiful. Then I watched you at Lady Taura's party. She has a large income but I happen to know she has to pay her broker £5,000 soon or be sold out of her American securities. She had her emerald at dinner. She had it at midnight. She had not got it after she had gone into the library for a gossip with the Home Secretary—though she didn't seem to notice her loss until the next morning. Well, a hostess has much on her mind. But I saw the emerald, and left it where it had apparently slipped from her finger between the cushions of the sofa on which she had been chatting with the Home Secretary—and on which, later on, you were flirting with that young ass Chubby Wimpole."

She looked at him steadily.

"You win," she said. "What are you going to do? Why haven't you told the police already?"

"Because you are only a frightened minnow, beautiful. What good will it do to put you behind bars? I want to catch the shark. I am hired to catch a big bad shark. And so I shall catch him, or know why."

She was intent on crushing out her half-smoked cigarette.

"Don't!" she whispered. "Leave him alone." Suddenly, never looking at him, she spoke very quickly. "Yes, I am frightened. He is a killer. Leave him alone, Gay Falcon. I warn you. He doesn't know yet—I dare *not* tell him—that you have taken the stuff from me. He is retiring from business next week—then he comes to collect my lot—it's less than half-of what there is in all—and starts on his travels—a retired and rich business man—to South America. Leave him alone, Gay Falcon. There's only one life."

"What about yours? What shall you do?"

She smiled faintly.

"Diana Temple," she said, "has taken a suite at the Ritz in Paris as from tomorrow. Perhaps you will dine with me there very soon, Mr. Falcon? Yes, I am running away—from fear, crime, everything." Her

fingers, diving quickly into her vanity-bag, as quickly slipped a small packet of tissue-paper into his hand. "You missed this last night. Put it among your collection. Then you have done all you were hired to do, and can take a holiday."

Shielded by the table-cloth, he examined the clip in his palm—a magnificent square emerald set in baguette diamonds.

"Lost or stolen," he said, "two nights ago at the Avalons' dance in Belgrave Square. I see. Thank you, Diana Temple." He tossed the tissue-paper onto the table, and slipped the clip into his pocket. "Now go home, beautiful. And I hope you mean what you say about running away. I don't like your friend, and if he should think the police are after you and that you might talk, then it will be a poor look-out for your dress-makers."

Her clear wide eyes, still poignant with hidden fear, regarded him thoughtfully.

"Why don't you," she said slowly, as though each word was an ordeal, "why don't you try to force his name out of me?"

"Because I have guessed it. Because I don't want you to be bumped off before you dine with me again—I'm particular about women, and I prefer

them alive. Because I want better evidence than my guess or your word. Because it's bed-time. Good night, Diana Temple."

She almost snatched up her bag and, as though she could not trust herself to say another word, left him very quickly. Had she glanced back from the restaurant-door, she would have surprised a look of queer anxiety on his usually saturnine face. The man called Gay Falcon had never in his life made a secret of the fact that he wished pretty women well, no matter what they might wish for him.

Not ten minutes later he let himself into his flat in St. James's Square nearby. He showed no surprise at finding two visitors comfortably awaiting him in the sitting-room. One of them was Chief-Inspector Poss, and the other was a beefy type whom even a blind thief would instantly have recognized as a detective.

"We rang the bell," said Poss innocently, "but as nobody answered and the door was ajar, we just came in to wait for you. This is Detective-Sergeant Daisy, but his name does him an injustice."

Gay Falcon, still standing, looked slowly around, glanced into his bedroom, then looked

at the Chief-Inspector with a smile in his deep hard eyes which would have done credit to a tiger suddenly confronted by a man with a niblick.

"You've got some cheek, Poss," he said, amiably enough. "I am sorry you have had your search for nothing."

"Not quite nothing," said the Chief-Inspector with satisfaction. "You will have to explain these in due course." He took three passports from an inside pocket and held them up. "Three passports, one for a man of independent means called Gay Stanhope Falcon, one for a soldier called Colonel Rock, who looks quite a bit like you, and one for a journalist with an address in Paris called Spencer Pott, who would be your twin-brother but for his moustache. You will have to explain these, *Mister Gay Stanhope Falcon.*"

Detective-Sergeant Daisy appeared to have formed a high opinion of his superior's sense of humour, and Falcon had to wait for his rugged laughter to die down before he said:

"You will have to do your own explaining tomorrow morning, Chief-Inspector, when you get a telephone call, as I fancy you will, from General Icelin: But don't let me interfere with your evening out. What do you want?"

The Chief-Inspector was looking at him thoughtfully.

"Do you know, Falcon, I shan't be a bit surprised to find that you are—or have been—military-intelligence. You've got that nasty look back of your eyes which one associates with M.I. I'll give you these passports back at one word from the right quarter, don't worry about that. What is worrying me is your attitude about this jewelry affair. Look here, Falcon, I'd much rather have you working with me than against me or on your own."

Falcon, his hands in his pockets, looked unsmilingly from one to the other.

"You didn't break into my flat to hand me a bouquet, Poss. What brought you here? A telephone message—about an hour ago?"

Both the Chief-Inspector and his subordinate started with surprise.

"We'll go into that later, Falcon. Now listen, and take it easy. We've got to search you. You can refuse. Then you come along with us and we'll search you all according to law. But it will be simpler if you allow us to search you here."

Falcon's eyes went to the telephone for a quick second. Then he said: "Go ahead but be quick. You and I are going to be busy tonight."

The two detectives, with Falcon's help, were quickly finished, finding nothing more than any man's usual belongings.

Poss sighed. "It was too good to be true. We received information to the effect that you would have in your possession the emerald and diamond clip stolen at Lady Avalon's dance the other night."

Falcon looked deadly serious. He snapped, "If you had found it, what would you have had to do?"

The Chief-Inspector stared, puzzled by Falcon's expression. "As far as anyone would know—anyone who might not know that we *might* be on your side—we would have to hold you pending full inquiries. You'd be charged first, of course." He added sharply, "What's up, Falcon? What's on your mind?"

Falcon said: "Wait a minute." Pacing up and down, he appeared to come to a conclusion, and stood facing the Chief-Inspector.

"Poss, the man who tried to frame me tonight didn't think the charge would stick—he is too clever for that. But he *did* think it would keep me quiet for a few days—so that he could get clear of the country. He is frightened. And dangerous."

"You mean," Poss said, "that these insurance thefts are tied to—"

"They are tied to murder. You were reminding me this morning of that pretty Mrs. Bowman who was found strangled in her flat one night last year. She was going to give certain information about stolen jewellery to Scotland Yard the next day, wasn't she?"

Poss said: "Apart from just one blurred fingerprint on a tumbler, we didn't get within a thousand miles of whoever killed Stella Bowman."

Falcon said: "Get this. If you do exactly as I say for the next hour or two you will put handcuffs on the owner of that fingerprint, the brain behind this insurance racket, and the killer of another pretty woman like the well-known Mrs. Bowman."

The Chief-Inspector reddened. "Another? What's this, Falcon? Who is it?"

"Take it easy, Poss. This murder won't come off. Now will you do as I say?"

The Chief-Inspector, glancing at his subordinate, said, "Go ahead, Falcon. You'll back me up, Daisy? We can but try. This chap Falcon knows a hell of a sight more about this than we do—perhaps more than is good for him. It certainly would be nice to get that strangler."

They sat in watchful silence while Falcon dialled a number. When he heard Diana Temple's voice, he said:

"Listen, beautiful, your little play didn't come off."

She gave a little shivering gasp.

"I know," he said softly. "I know how frightened you are. Listen—"

"But if," she gasped, "he finds out that the police aren't holding you, and that you have given them my name and that they are going to question me, he will come and—"

"The police are here with me, after searching me without success. You should have told me at dinner that he had instructed you to frame me. Then I could have taken steps to see to your safety. But it's not too late now, if you will do what you are told."

"But—but what *did* you do with the clip?"

"You will find it at the bottom of your bag, where I slipped it back. I trust nobody, sweetheart. Now—for your own safety—will you follow my instructions to the letter?"

"Yes—oh, Gay Falcon, yes! I can't face him—when he finds that you really are after him."

"You will have to face him, Diana, because he will come to see you very soon. He has a key, of course? I am going to

let him know in the next few minutes that the police are to question you in the morning."

"But you mustn't—you can't! You're telling him to kill me, like he did—"

"Be calm, lady. You will be better protected than Stella Bowman. Now do as you are told. Go to bed immediately."

"Yes? And?"

"That's all. Just go to bed. And wait. Just wait. Read a nice thriller, if you like."

She laughed unsteadily. "I thought better—of you—than to make fun of my fears."

"Don't worry—I am going to cure you of your fears forever. Trust in me, beautiful."

He snapped down the receiver and turned to the Chief-Inspector, who was glaring at him.

"You are risking a woman's life, Falcon—even though she is an accomplice—"

"One moment, Poss. If you are going to arrest this woman—and you've no idea who she is yet—I go no further with this business. This girl is dining with me in Paris the day after tomorrow, and I simply won't have my evening messed up, and that's flat."

"One thing at a time, Falcon—all right, don't fly off the handle. Now, how are you going to let the big man know

we are after this dame?"

"You are going to let him know, Poss. It is now eleven. Mr. Harvey Morgan, known as Chappie, is at his desirable residence in Grosvenor Street nearby giving a men's dinner. Ring him up right now and tell him, just as a matter of interest, that you were given some bogus information about that man Falcon tonight; that you have searched him without success for stolen property; that Falcon has promised to work with you and has given you the name of a lady whom you are going to question first thing in the morning; and that you are ringing him up just to tell him and other directors of Universal & Allied that you will have some interesting information to give them at noon tomorrow. Snap to it, Chief-Inspector."

"Holy smoke!" said Poss. "Chappie Morgan, is it! This is going to make the headlines all right. Chappie Morgan, eh! I always wondered where he really came from."

"Last year," said Detective-Sergeant Daisy with relish, "I made a nice little bit on a horse of his at Gatwick. The bookmakers are going to take a day off when Chappie hangs, for it's said he has won packets and—"

"That's enough of your low gossip, Daisy," said the Chief-

Inspector severely. "Now, Falcon, this Mr. Harvey Morgan is an important man. You really mean me to ring him up and—"

Gay Falcon showed his teeth in a grin which lacked even the pretense of amiability. "You must introduce me to your mother, Poss, so I can ask her if you were bumped on the head when a child. Now get busy, man, before that dinner-party breaks up."

When the Chief-Inspector had spoken his piece to Mr. Harvey Morgan he turned a jaundiced eye on Gay Falcon.

"If his reactions to that rigmarole," he said bitterly, "weren't those of an innocent man, I'll—I'll disguise myself as a policewoman."

"You'd have to grow a moustache first," said Falcon. "What did he say?"

"First, he chuckled himself silly, and then—"

"I've known a laughing murderer," said Sergeant Daisy. "He had some kind of gland trouble and—"

"You shut up," said the Chief-Inspector violently. "And then, when I tell Chappie that juicy bit about the important information I am going to give them at noon tomorrow, he says he always knew. Gay Falcon was a clever chap with a mind so crooked that he could

see round corners, and he congratulates us all."

"Right!" said Falcon briskly. "Now, Poss, if you can be serious for a moment, put on that awful bowler of yours and follow me. Either of you got a gun?"

"No, we haven't. We are policemen, not gentlemen detectives."

"Okay. Sailors can't swim either."

Falcon snatched an automatic from a drawer and was slipping it into his pocket, when Poss said:

"I'll have that, mister. You've a license, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," said Falcon savagely. "Mussolini himself gave it to me to use as a toothpick whenever I felt extra peaceful after meals."

Mrs. Temple's apartment was on the fourth floor of one of those handsome new blocks of flats which try very hard to look like imposing homes for rich people and succeed in looking like hospitals for rich people being treated for loneliness.

The bedroom window of each flat gave out onto a small balcony. This was not strictly a balcony but in the nature of a decoration, and therefore it was a somewhat tight fit for the substantial figures of the two

detectives and Gay Falcon.

Mrs. Temple, whose maid slept in the domestic quarters, had let them in and passed them through her bedroom to the hide-out on the balcony. She had tried to smile at Falcon, but she had confessed to wishing he had thought of trying some other method of catching his shark.

Chief-Inspector Poss, squeezed into a corner of the balcony, was not in the best of tempers. For one thing, it was a chilly night, and for another, he didn't like being on balconies.

"We'd look darn silly," he said sourly, "if this thing gave way and we fell into the square like Juliets in trousers."

"We are only doing our duty, sir," said Daisy, who was enjoying himself.

The bedroom window was ajar, so that they could hear anything that passed in the room. The thick curtains were not drawn, but the white net across the windows was sufficient to make the visibility poor. Still, the watchers on the tiny balcony could see everything in outline, and they could hear the slightest sound. Mrs. Temple was in bed, her eyes on a book.

"I don't like this," said the Chief-Inspector. "Suppose he pulls a gun on her before we can stop him?"

"It would be tough luck on her, wouldn't it?" said Falcon. "She certainly makes a pretty picture."

Suddenly the bedroom door was seen to open, noiselessly. The watchers stood rigid, Poss with the automatic in his hand. A man came in, a tall bulky shape. Mrs. Temple, unaware, still had her eyes on her book.

"Well, Diana?"

The start of surprise with which she put down the book was, considering how frightened she must be, a pretty piece of acting.

"Harry! What is it—why have you come tonight, when you said—"

He came towards the bed, and his face became clearer to the watchers on the balcony. Chief-Inspector Poss turned startled eyes on Falcon.

"Diana," the man said conversationally, "I am afraid I have bad news for you. But in a way it's your own fault for not having managed to frame Falcon and give me time to get away."

"But I tried to, darling, only he must have suspected and—"

"I know, I know. Luck is good or bad. It's bad now, Diana—for you. Falcon has been very clever. It was that fool Morgan who insisted on engaging him for this investiga-

tion, and now he knows a sight too much. I was dining with Chappie tonight when the police rang him up to say that they are going to question you in the morning, and I fear, Diana, that I can't risk that. Of course, a wife can't give evidence against her husband, but she can—if she hates going to prison as much as you do—give the police a lot of very dangerous information."

Detective-Sergeant Daisy, more pop-eyed than ever, stared at Poss and whispered, "Lemme, 'arry Temple in the flesh! I 'ad my suspicions of 'im ten years ago, just before he vanished, and then he was as bald as my palm."

Temple was sitting on the side of his wife's bed now. They could not see her expression. They could only see that she stiffened against the pillows behind her.

"Harry," she whispered, "you can't—you can't! Not to me—"

"I don't want to, Diana, but how can I help myself? With the jewellery I've got tucked away and my American investments, I can still live my life out in Mexico. And I've always told you I wouldn't be taken—and if, at the worst, I've got to be, I'd rather hang than rot in prison. But I fancy I can get away tonight, in Chappie's

aeroplane from Heston. I'm really sorry, Diana, because I've loved you for ten years, and you've been a darned helpful wife, but I can't trust you when you are questioned tomorrow, and—"

"But they will get you, anyway," she whispered frantically. "Probably all the airports are watched. I told Falcon your name and that you killed Stella Bowman—"

As she said that name, Temple's expression, hitherto queerly normal and almost affectionate, hardened into such savage contempt that she screamed.

"You double-crossing vixen," he said very quietly, and as she screamed again his bulk obliterated all but her fair hysterical face, and his hands dug deep into her throat.

As the watchers on the balcony burst into the room, Harry Temple, his gloved hands still savaging his wife's throat, gave a thick sobbing gasp. His handsome face stared at them with a look of idiotic surprise, and then he leapt frantically towards the door.

Poss and Daisy had no difficulty in holding him, while Gay Falcon, his eyes darting about the room, stood by the bed patting Mrs. Temple's clutching hand. Trying to smile

up at him thankfully, her breath came in bruised hysterical sobs.

Temple, held by the detectives, seemed to collapse.

"Henry Edward Hammer-sley," Poss began in his official voice, "or Henry Edward Temple, I am going to charge you with the attempted murder of your wife. There will be other charges. You will accompany me to Vine Street and—"

Harry Temple turned blindly towards the bed and, his blurred eyes accusing his wife, made some thick incoherent sounds even as a violent spasm made him sag helpless in the detectives' arms. Poss and Daisy got him to a chair. Poss reddened with temper.

"Daisy, ring a doctor quick. He has poisoned himself somehow."

Mrs. Temple, sobbing uncontrollably, suddenly clung tight to Gay Falcon's arm.

"I won't," Poss said savagely, "ever hear the end of this if he gets away with it—right under my nose. But how could I have stopped him?"

"You couldn't help it," Falcon said. "I'll back you up."

"Please, please," Diana Temple sobbed, "don't let him—die—in here! Please—I can't bear any more—he always said he'd poison himself if—"

Poss was busy searching the unconscious man's pockets.

Falcon pointed to a tiny rubber bulb and some remnants of smashed glass on the floor between the bed and the chair on which Temple lay.

"That's how he did it, Poss—a hypodermic. We crushed it under our feet as he dropped it. You don't have to tell me it smells of bitter almonds—they always do."

Poss, carefully putting the remnants of the hypodermic into a handkerchief, said soothingly:

"All right, Mrs. Temple, we'll do our best. Falcon, give me a hand while Daisy is telephoning and we'll get Temple out into the hall."

"I can't," said Gay Falcon, smiling tenderly at Mrs. Temple's lovely distracted face. "This lady is in no state to be left alone even for a moment—and I guess she needs a doctor a good deal more than Harry Temple does by now."

Poss looked at him with disgust, but just then Sergeant Daisy came back and between them they heaved Temple's inert bulk out of the room.

Falcon at once sat on the bed, and while she clung to him with terror that would not be soothed, he ran the fingers of one hand protectively through her soft fair hair.

"Thank God," she whispered, "you were here, Gay Falcon! Where would I be now but for you? Oh, I can't bear to think of—"

Poss re-entered the room and looked at them, particularly at Falcon, with severe disapproval.

"Mrs. Temple," he said sternly, "I regret to have to tell you that your husband has cheated the law. I shall have to take a brief statement from you now, while a full statement can be taken in the morning in the presence of your lawyer. Mr. Falcon, will you be so good as to leave the lady alone for just one minute so that she can give me her undivided attention?"

Still clinging to Falcon's arm, Diana Temple was obviously on the verge of an hysterical collapse.

"I simply can't talk now," she pleaded frantically. "Gay, please tell him—make him leave it all till—"

Poss said: "I sympathize, Mrs. Temple; but a couple of minutes will suffice. From what we overheard we can establish that the dead man was the brain behind the insurance thefts and also the murderer of Stella Bowman. Further, we were ourselves witnesses of as clear a case of attempted murder as—"

"Attempted?" said Gay Falcon, still caressing Mrs. Tem-

ple's hair. "Why attempted, Poss? Henry Edward Temple was very thoroughly murdered—right under our noses—by his loving wife."

As she tried to wrench herself away, he held her to him more tightly, in what was now a grotesque parody of affection. She said not a word, her breath coming in thick gasps. Then, suddenly, she threw her head back and started screaming.

Falcon let her fall back onto the bed. She went on screaming, contorting her body frantically beneath the bedclothes. Daisy ran in, pop-eyed.

"Let her yell," Falcon said. "She's an expert on hysterics. Restraine your pity, Daisy—she had darn little for Stella Bowman when she strangled her."

Poss said: "But look here, we found the smashed hypodermic with which he—"

Falcon held out a pocket handkerchief, on which lay another small hypodermic, unbroken, half-full.

"She had two—I was looking for this under the pillow while you and she thought I was flirting with her. It was almost undetectable murder, given the circumstances. A clear case of a thief and murderer—so we were expected to think—poisoning himself to escape the law. But what actually happened was

that as Temple made a grab at her she chucked one hypodermic onto the floor, pretty certain it would be trodden underfoot, and then, just as we came in, jabbed him in the thigh with the other. You'll find her fingerprints on this."

Diana Temple, her lovely eyes dilated, lay staring at Gay Falcon.

"You beast!" she whispered. "You sneaky filthy Romeo! But you can't prove I killed Stella Bowman!"

Falcon regarded her absent-ly. "You should watch your words, Mrs. Temple—they will be used against you."

Once outside in the hall, Poss said: "How did you get on to her?"

"Not till almost the last minute, Poss. Though I have been married to two pretty women and thought I was hard-boiled, she had me on a string all right. She had me just where she wanted me, believing that she was being victimized by Hammersley or Morgan, I wasn't quite certain which. It was always obvious that an insurance man was behind this racket.

"And then, at almost the very last minute, she made a mistake. Remember, she told Temple quite *unnecessarily* that she had told *me* who he was

and that he had killed Stella Bowman. Then I knew that she was goading him into trying to kill her, and I wondered why. Remember, she did not accuse him of having killed Mrs. Bowman; all she said was that she had told me so—"

"So that we, listening, could pin the charge on him—and also, when he made a grab at her, so that she could get a good chance of putting him away? All right, that can stick. You can kill in self-defense—but not with poison, and not when you *know* detectives are there to protect you. But why in God's name did she have to put Temple away?"

"Because, if he escaped, she would always be frightened of him and he might interfere with her life as the beautifully dressed and frantically fashionable Diana Temple—and being one of the best-dressed women in the world has been the money motive behind her crimes. Because, again, if he was arrested, he would have given us proofs that she was not only the brains behind the insurance racket but also the killer of Stella Bowman. But I fancy she was right there, you will never convict her of that crime—Temple's death will be quite enough to go on with. An unpleasant character. But she will look swell in the box, all in black."

Rufus King

Anatomy of a Crime

Strangely enough, we do not usually think of Rufus King's stories about Florida's Gold Coast as "inverted detective stories"; yet they are—stories told from two opposing viewpoints, one the murderer's, the other the detective's (in this instance, the detailed inquiry by our old friend Stuff Driscoll, Chief Criminal Investigator of the Sheriff's Department) . . . and which one will outwit the other?

"Anatomy of a Crime," a short novel complete in this anthology, is the story of two stepbrothers and the \$3,000,000 that came between them; it is also in the "pure" tradition of the inverted detective story: scrupulously fair to the reader, but we hasten to warn you—be on your guard every paragraph of the way, be on the alert for every deftly planted clue. Remember the art of the magician: the hand is quicker than the eye, and misdirection is the key to bafflement. The detective-story magician uses words instead of hands, and words can be faster than the mind: the words seem to mean a certain thing but if you interpret the words correctly they mean something else—the truth . . .

Detective: STUFF DRISCOLL

A mong the more artistic circles of Florida's Gold Coast the Helber stepbrothers were, with fair regularity, news. They were never more so, however, than on that heat-drugged morning of Sunday, July 11th, when Edmund Helber was discovered in a

bloody red mess because his throat had been permanently sliced.

Edmund was the older of the two young men and the controller of the large Helber fortune. He was usually engaged in discovering, publicizing, and coddling some new young

artistic talent, whereas Saltus, whose appreciation of art was limited to the engravings that graced United States paper money, would be irritatingly busied in exposing his image among the intelligentsia as a stinker, a Philistine, and a superlative cad.

Both were bachelors. Edmund, the offspring of his father's first marriage, took after his mother. She, Esthasia, had been constructed along the swaying, rhythmical lines of a Botticelli and had herself been an artist of, well, local note. She had died in an anemic fashion shortly after Edmund's birth.

When Edmund had reached the age of 16, his father—the Clifford ("Stoneface") Helber—acquired a second wife. Diana was a widow and the mother of one child, Saltus, then aged ten. Superficially, Diana was a pastiche of Esthasia, but whereas Esthasia's approach toward art had been inherent and genuine, Diana's was nothing more than a calculating acquired veneer that had been hastily slapped on for the sole purpose of gaffing Stoneface's pelf.

This predilection of Stoneface for art-saturated wives was a peculiar thing. His fortune had been based on oil, with his earlier wildcatting days having

earned him his sobriquet—his rugged features and monolithic physique having been comparable to a Borglum attack on Mt. Rushmore. By the time he was settled enough, and loaded enough, for matrimony, you would have expected him to select as a mate someone more wholesomely busty, along Mae-Westian lines, rather than any hybrid flower from the Arcadian fields. Undoubtedly his later life addiction and craving for Culture lay at the bottom of it, his own casual acquirement of the commodity having been stopped, by request, at the eighth grade.

This marriage Number 2 lasted for twelve years—a stretch that carried Edmund to the age of 28 and his stepbrother Saltus to 22.

Saltus by this time had developed physically into a pictorial prototype of the All-American boy, but with, unhappily, the inner furnishings of an intelligent diamond-back rattler. All attempts on Stoneface's part to pump Culture and a sense of civic responsibility into the handsome reptile had failed, and his stepfather finally recognized him for what he was—a clean-limbed, honest-faced con artist, a potential hustler, and beneath his pleasing surface a significantly overripe egg.

Edmund, on the other hand, completely filled the bill of what Stoneface sentimentally dreamed a second generation scion of a wealthy, self-made, ill-educated man should be. Edmund had been graduated from Duke with academic honors and a workable patina of good manners that extended from what to do when your dinner partner knocks over a plate of soup to how properly to defer to an elder stuffed shirt or stuffed bosom.

Furthermore, to Stoneface's gratification, Edmund had elected after Duke to sojourn for a year among the ateliers of Paris where he purely applied himself to the study of painting. But the Left Bank had remained for him a river's edge and nothing else.

Following this Parisian stint, Edmund had solidified his cultural status by opening an art gallery in the Helber home town of Halcyon, a pleasant small community that lies on the coast between Miami and Fort Lauderdale. He named the gallery somewhat whimsically, if aptly, the Salle des Inconnus. He became a ranking member of the Episcopal Church, an active sponsor of the local YMCA, and was also on his way toward becoming a director of the South Florida Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

The termination of marriage Number 2 (and the beginning of this rather Machiavellian crime report) was the unfortunate result of Stoneface's private plane crashing in the Everglades shortly after a takeoff from Halcyon's Aero Club en route to St. Petersburg. He and Diana were the plane's sole occupants; an assortment of dinner-happy alligators were the sole witnessing attendants, and a convenient amount of features, teeth, et cetera, were left to afford accurate identification of the bodies when search parties located the scene a couple of days later.

What might be considered as having been the incubation period of murder undoubtedly occurred at the reading of Stoneface's last will and testament. This stereotyped formality took place at Trianon, the Helber estate which sprawled immaculately over several subtropical landscaped acres just to the west of Halcyon.

Artemus Wilksby, the Helber family lawyer, presided. A contemporary and longtime friend of Stoneface, Wilksby was in complete accord as to the characteristics of the two Helber heirs, being satisfied that Edmund, at 28, was an exemplar of the best moral and civic virtues, and that Saltus, at 22, was endowed with all the

makings of an incipient wastrel and a grade double-A bum.

"I'm going to cut this short," he said to both of them when they had gathered (after the dual parental funeral) in Trianon's culture-choked library. "I'll leave this lengthy copy of the will for you to wade through at your leisure, and don't get it into your heads that because it's a bit odd that it isn't unbreakably sound. I frankly admit I feel that Stonefa—that Clifford went somewhat overboard in not appointing a more mature and less propinquous (that was the word he used) executor; but you are both familiar with how pig-headed he could be once he made up his mind."

"Leading up, I suppose," Saltus said with sugar-coated venom, "to the fact that Edmund inherits the estate and the control of it, and my share is the dear old cliché of the one-dollar bill."

"On the contrary," Wilksby's voice stayed professionally restrained. "The estate is divided between you straight down the middle with the exception of this house and grounds, which become wholly Edmund's. But, I must add, the inheritance is subject to certain conditions."

"Ah!" Saltus exposed an Italian smile. "The snapper. I

refer, sir, to the tail of your statement."

"Quite so."

"The scorpion's sting?"

"Now really, Saltus!" Edmund placed a pale, beginning-to-get-pudgy hand on his stepbrother's strapping shoulder. "You say too many things that you don't truly mean. Just for effect."

Saltus, whose mind had a quick-silver fluidity for figuring a situation's angles, decided that the proper attitude for the moment called for a splash of humility.

"Oh, I'm sure that the conditions are reasonable," he said, but he couldn't keep from adding, "or at least bearable."

Wilksby shot him a glance from under a set of eyebrows that suggested two shags of Spanish moss. "You must understand," he said, "that Diana, due to her death, no longer figures in any provisions that had been made for her. The estate now involves no one but you two."

"Conditionally."

"Exactly, Saltus, and particularly as it concerns you. Briefly, each half of the estate will add up—after taxes and other essential nuisances—to around three million dollars—six million in all. Edmund's half is his with no strings attached. Yours, Saltus, is to be held in

trust until your thirtieth birthday—eight years from now. Your stepbrother is the sole executor of this trust and is empowered to pay you part or the entirety of its income at his discretion."

"I understand, sir." Saltus' outer casing, especially his face, took on a wafer-thin transfer depicting the Birth of Reformation. It was slightly shattered by his tone of voice as he asked, "And at the age of thirty?"

"If then, in Edmund's sole opinion, your character and approach toward life warrant it, the trust is dissolved and the inheritance becomes unconditionally yours. If Edmund's decision at that time is negative, the capital goes to forming a Cultural Foundation, the purposes and structure of which you will find outlined in loving detail in the will. Finally, if Edmund were to die before your thirtieth birthday the trust is automatically dissolved and your share of the estate becomes freely yours. Edmund's share, of course, will go in any manner he may care to bequeath it."

"This," Saltus could not help saying, "is straight out of a dime novel."

"I agree, my boy, that a tinge of the old-time melodrama is indeed apparent. Unfortunately, Clifford's in

some ways simple mind worked that way."

"Please," Edmund's slender features became surfaced with stepbrotherly concern, "please—both of you—surely you can see that father did what he thought and hoped was for the best? For *your* best, Saltus? You'll come to thank him for it. I know you will."

And in such fashion—stern hand from beyond the grave—was the scene set for the kill. With kind, good, upright Edmund Helber cast in the leading role of Sitting Duck. The virus of homicide festered within Saltus for three months before coming to a head . . .

Blunt force—stab wound—bullet and other missile wounds—strangulation—suffocation—asphyxiating gas—inorganic poison—organic poison—miscellaneous poisons—a blissful galaxy of surefire instruments for a homicidal death. All were cozily contained, dissected, and expounded at infinite detail in an estimable volume that Saltus had unearthed from the research stacks of the Halcyon Public Library. The Messrs. Gonzales, Vance, Helpern, and Umberger were responsible for the illuminating work under the title of *Legal Medicine: Pathology and Toxicology*.

A gold mine, Saltus decided. One that yielded to his crafty mind precious nuggets of not only how such things were done, but what happened during autopsies after you did them.

Even though the library's air-conditioning system had broken down, he endured three visits on three successive heat-sweated July days to thumb through the tome. His ultimate decision for the best, the *safest* (for the murderer) setup for a presumed "suicide," fell within a chapter dealing with stabs and cuts. He absorbed with interest and fact that the majority of incised fatal wounds *were* suicidal and that such cases, at date of the book's publication, averaged about 35 to 40 a year in New York City alone.

The suicidal cuts, he learned, were most commonly inflicted on the throat. Of special interest was the fact that the characteristic pattern of the suicidal wound consistently revealed *repeated hesitant attempts to slash the throat in the same line of incision*.

Saltus felt confidently assured that these "hesitation marks" would offer unquestionable proof to any trained observer (and the Sheriff's Department of Broward County had just that) or Medical Examiner (ditto) that the case

was one of self-destruction. As a clincher, he read that on the other hand *homicidal* wounds of the neck and throat did *not* show any such marks of hesitation.

The room's air-conditionless heat seeped from his pores as he closed the book for the last time and returned it to the stacks. Overriding this delightful bouquet of lethal flowers which he had just gathered was the fortuitous realization that stepbrother Edmund always shaved with an old-fashioned, tenderly stropped straight-edge razor.

The next item on the murderous agenda was the problem of motivation. For what reason would upright, wealthy, honorable, and civically honored Edmund take his own life? The more rakish scandalous causes such as women, gambling, and peculation were out. Women, for Edmund, were largely abstract entities, and were certainly so insofar as any illicit or grand passions might be concerned. His attitude toward them was that of uncle-to-niece, or if they were older specimens of the sex, which they usually were, of complacent nephew to tolerated aunt.

All forms of gambling (Church Fair knock-'em-downs excepted) stood in Edmund's

book as devices of the Devil, and any suggestion of peculation with a \$3,000,000 inheritance under his belt was of course absurd.

Well, what then?

Suddenly, with one of those illuminating flashes that so delight in inspiring the wicked, Saltus thought of Oscar.

Young Oscar Fortisman was stepbrother Edmund's current protégé. A Muscle Beach specimen so far as his physical attributes went, Oscar's career up to the moment of his having been discovered by Edmund had been the exasperating one of a local third-string fighter in the light-heavyweight class. By the age of 24 this had brought him little more glamorous than hamburgers and was showing no promise of enriching his menu in the future.

Somewhere among Oscar's genes, however, must have lain an atavistic linkage with some indeterminate ancestor who had had a bent toward paint. This, Oscar expressed in furtive studies that were intended to depict varying aspects of the manly art. His talent, for he did have talent—the intrusive gene took care of that—lay in the genre of Grandma Moses gone overboard about ringside fauna rather than barns and bucolic life.

Edmund's discovery of Oscar

had been the result of a joke. Semi-annually, the Junior Art Guild of Halcyon would put on an exhibition by rapt amateurs in the band-shell purlieu of Tropicana Park. A couple of Oscar's fellow hammer-heads had got wise to his hidden weakness and had laughed themselves sillier than usual by swiping three of his canvases and inserting them in the exhibition's lineup. The high point of the jest had been the tacking on of cards penned with Oscar's name and address and pricing each sketch at the ridiculous sum of \$500.

Edmund bought all three paintings.

"Look here, Oscar," Edmund had said, after Oscar had come out of shock, "you may not realize it but you have a positive talent. I might even go so far as to say that you touch on genius—a bit primitive, but still genius. What you need is a guiding hand. In short, me."

All this had occurred two months back in the middle of May. Oscar, still partially stupefied from his stroke of good fortune, found himself lifted from his accustomed athletic-supporter milieu and installed in what Edmund called his "protégé studio" on the Helber estate. This was a small building of almost-Spanish design having one large workroom

with a glass wall of clear northern light, a bedroom, bath, and utility kitchenette. It was separated from Trianon by a good half-acre stretch and stood secure in the privacy of a guarding stand of live oak trees and banyans.

In this idyllic setting, supplied with all imaginable tools of his craft, including a complete spectrum of Winsor & Newton paints, Oscar was housed, gormandizingly fed via transport from the mainhouse kitchen, and encouraged by Edmund's inspirational pep talks to let loose upon a totally unsuspecting world the fruits of his genius. These pugilistic canvases were programmed to explode around year's end in a one-man show at Edmund's Salle des Inconnus.

Yes, Saltus decided, *that* would be the one sort of nightmare scandal that could unquestionably be swallowed by a Sheriff's Investigator and a Medical Examiner as having caused Edmund (a shining pillar in church and youth activities) to take his own life... under threat of blackmail and extortion as a member of the Gold Coast's Lavender Set.

Whether the actual fact of Edmund being a homosexual were true or false had no bearing. Implication, suspicion, plain libel were enough. How

avidly, Saltus pondered happily, was the fickle public willing to accept and castigate an idol's reputed feet of clay!

What the effect of any such frameup as Saltus proposed to arrange would have on young Oscar's reputation did not concern Saltus in the least. Pawns were essential in any macabre game of lethal chess and, being pawns, they were expendable . . .

The deathly morning of Sunday, July 11th, began at five o'clock for Edmund with the pleasant serenity that characterized the majority of his days. There was nothing irrational about this early rising. The Gold Coast's bacchanalia of cocktail gambols, splash parties, alcoholic cookouts, and ribald night clubs were but forms of mental and physical poison in his estimation, and so, except for occasional evenings of antisepic bridge, he would usually go to bed around ten and feel slept out by five A.M.

Trianon's staff naturally had no such idiotic a schedule. Consequently, while Edmund would be sniffing the dawn scents of break-of-day, the Swiss butler and his wife the cook, the Jamaican housemaid, the Virgin Island gardener, and the Haitian yard boy would all be corked off in their separate

quarters and would stay corked off for another hour or more at the least.

Edmund's getting-up routine rarely varied. He took a series of deep breaths, standing in cotton pajama shorts at French doors that opened on a blossom-scented patio. This was followed by twelve push-ups with no special effect on his muscular development, which was skimpy. In a small service pantry he filled and turned on an electric coffee percolator. He split and toasted two English muffins and, when they were done, buttered each hot half lavishly with the real product from a cow.

He arranged the *petit dejuner* on a tray which he placed on a table in front of the patio French doors. He was working on his second still-warm and butter-drenched English muffin, and placidly contemplating the beauties of the morning, when Saltus came in.

Speculation rippled through Edmund at such an unprecedented dawnlike appearance of his stepbrother. Could the leopard truly be changing his spots? Saltus' unusual visits to the Halcyon Public Library had been remarked upon to Edmund by a Miss Ascerton, an assistant librarian who was also a member of an art class that met once a week at the Salle

des Inconnus. The report had pleased Edmund as he considered it to be a hopefully indicative step on Saltus' part along the road to Culture. He had agreed with Miss Ascerton that the visits were especially commendable in view of the then sparsity of library visitors owing to the broken-down air-conditioning system having turned the building into a hothouse.

And now this—this healthy early-rising, clear-eyed greeting of the day. A flick of disapproval touched him at the flamboyancy of Saltus' dressing gown—a puce Chinese affair splotched over with crimson dragons—but such sartorial quirks were inconsequential when stacked against the ethical and moral drive toward reformation of his stepbrother's character.

"Well, good morning, Saltus," he said cheerfully. "Sit down and have some coffee. Toast more muffins, if you like."

"I will," Saltus said. "Got to use your bathroom first."

Edmund's inner speculating altered slightly from the pleasing to the puzzled. Something odd in Saltus' manner, something tense as his stepbrother headed for the bathroom door and vanished through it, bothered him. And why *this*

bathroom in the first place? Why not have used the one in his own quarters in the other wing of the house? A sudden need, of course—such trivial crises did occur—but the whole air of the matter was disturbing.

Edmund was further startled (almost to the point of dropping the last half piece of the deliciously buttered muffin back on the plate) when the bathroom door was flung open and Saltus came moving toward him in a fashion that Edmund could only define as being ominously determined. He felt, absurdly, that his stepbrother had a positive nemesis look.

And why under the sun was Saltus holding his right hand behind his back as though it were concealing something?

This mystery was briefly exposed to Edmund as Saltus stepped around the table in order to reach the rear of Edmund's chair. Surely, Edmund decided, the object he had caught a glimpse of in Saltus' inexplicably white-cotton-gloved hand had been—

"Isn't that my razor?" Edmund asked in bewilderment. "What on earth are you going to do with it?"

"This," Saltus said.

And he proceeded to do it.

Making the all-important "hesitation marks" proved to be the job that was to blow up

Saltus' iced control. The operative incisive slash had been effective so far as ending Edmund's existence was concerned but—the blood. It took a long moment for Saltus to suppress the jolt which the sight of the sanguine flow gave him, and he stood graven, his eyes fixed glassily on Edmund's body as it slumped in the chair with both arms hanging macaroni-like toward the floor.

The hypnotic blood, now that Edmund's heart was stilled, had decreased to a lethargy of seeping. It was a lethargy comparable with the slowdown of Saltus' power to think. A mourning dove symbolically set up its measured dirge outside in a banyan tree and slowly, fearfully slowly, Saltus' wits began to reactivate.

He forced himself again to seize Edmund by the hair and pull his head back until the full horror of the cut throat lay exposed. The moment had come when, with surgical precision, the clue must be planted that would officially stamp Edmund's death as irrevocably one of suicide.

The "hesitation marks"—the repeated hesitant attempts to slice the throat in the same line of the fatal cut.

Still holding the razor with cotton-gloved fingers in such a manner that prints left in

Edmund's daily shaving would not be smudged, Saltus forced himself to cut several hesitant slashes in the direction of and alongside the major incision. Then he dropped the razor on the floor beneath Edmund's dangling right hand.

Done. And to perfection.

There remained—*must that damned dove keep moaning?*—only the placing of the note. This consisted of a sheet of cheap paper on which (aping many precedents) an exposure threat and extortion demand had been pasted with words cut out by Saltus from newspapers and magazines.

Before removing the suicide note from a pocket of his dressing gown—where it lay loosely folded in a handkerchief that served as a guard against any direct contact with his own fingers—Saltus went into the bathroom and held his blood-stained, gloved right hand under cold running water until the red flow paled. He then wrung the glove as dry as possible and shoved it (for later disposal) into an opposite pocket from the one containing the note.

He dried his hands, leaving no hint of bloodstain, then threw the towel into a hamper.

The point had now arrived when a necessary amount of improvisation was called for. In all his detailed planning the

precise setup of the suicidal scene could not have been prearranged except in the most general terms of time and locale, and for a short period of intensive thought Saltus found himself faced with a serious dilemma.

As the scene stood, Edmund had been placidly eating toasted muffins and drinking coffee at the very moment when he had decided to kill himself. Obviously this was absurd, and the incongruity would surely be noted. The requisite essentials were easy to catalogue: Edmund must receive the note (how?), read it, decide on suicide, procure his razor from the bathroom, and then (why? why? why?) return to his chair at the breakfast table and cut his throat.

Rarely had Saltus' Machiavellian brain operated more keenly under stress. Only the element of time seemed in his favor: a good hour still remained before the household staff would be astir. He also knew that he would not be faced with the common run of law-enforcement officers. Trianon stood just outside the incorporated area of Halycon, and the county authorities would be in charge. A questionable Helber death would call for the best—for the Chief Criminal Investigator of the

Sheriff's Department himself. A certain Stuff Driscoll.

Saltus had never encountered Driscoll, but he was aware of his record from laudatory publicity covering previous cases, and the man was undeniably tops in his field. In one sense this was exactly what Saltus had hoped for in his planning—that the investigation would be in charge of the trained type of criminologist his murder plot required—a man for whom the "hesitation marks" would clinch a verdict of suicide.

But in another sense this placid breakfast setup would emphatically give a man of Driscoll's intellect and experience pause. Saltus took a grip on his nerves and refused to panic. Take things, he commanded his brain, in their proper order.

First, how and when was the note received? Swiftly a succession of possible solutions were discarded as he viewed each through the clinical eyes of detective Driscoll:

There must be an immediacy in the method of delivery. It must be timed to have reached Edmund after he had arranged his breakfast and while he had still been in the process of leisurely eating.

And then it came—again that flash of inspiration that so

delights, as had been previously noted, in inspiring the wicked.

Stepping out into the patio, Saltus went to a rock garden that graced one of its corner arrangements and selected a lemon-sized piece of coral. Using the protective handkerchief as a guard against leaving his own fingerprints, he wrapped and pressed the note around the coral. Standing a bit back from the French doors, he tossed the chunk into the room so that it fell squarely on the breakfast table.

He then followed it inside and, still using the protective handkerchief, unwrapped the note and left it lying flat, face up, on the table near Edmund's plate. He replaced the handkerchief in his pocket.

Saltus then reconstructed the scenario as he presumed it would be deduced through Driscoll's eyes: Edmund at breakfast, sipping coffee, when plunk on the table falls the note-wrapped piece of coral. Certainly a shock. As an artistic inspirational touch Saltus lifted by its slender handle (so that no fingerprints were possible) the half-filled cup of coffee, as though it had been raised to Edmund's lips when the note smacked in. Then he let the cup drop back onto the table where it lay overturned in its puddle of spilled coffee.

He continued to envision Driscoll's reconstruction: swiftly Edmund leaps to his feet and examines the patio for the rock thrower who, adroitly, has made good his escape through the bordering shrubs. Calmer, but still deeply puzzled, Edmund returns to the table and removes the note from the coral. He reads.

Edmund's previous shock would be as nothing compared with the one he experiences now. His mind is shattered, paralyzed; at this threat of disclosure of his perverted relationship with his "protégés," at the demand for \$10,000 as the price of silence, at the knowledge that this initial demand would be pyramidied throughout all the coming years, with public disgrace dangling a sword of Damocles constantly over his head.

Bewildered, all but insane from shock, Edmund staggers to the bathroom, gets his razor, then—

Then?

Why not have cut his throat right then and there above the wash basin?

Because he is impelled once more to read the note. So he totters back to the table, sits, reads, and there follow the few dreadful moments of screwing up enough courage to take the

plunge. At last the decision is finalized. A hesitant cut with the razor, then another hesitant cut—followed by the deadly slash.

Yes, Saltus decided, in just such fashion would Driscoll reconstruct the scene—assisted, if necessary, by oblique suggestions from Saltus himself. The scenario would hold—it was foolproof.

And that's the way it went. For a while.

Almost.

Shortly after eight o'clock Mr. Artemus Wilksby, with the measured leisure of the mid-sixties, got out of bed. He indulged in nothing so feeble-minded as setting-up exercises but headed directly for the bathroom where, prior to any amenities, he downed a good slug of bourbon and branch water. By ten of nine, shaved, showered, and comfortably clothed in a church-going suit of lightweight material, he was ready for breakfast.

A widower and childless, Wilksby's household staff consisted of a middle-aged couple, Washington and Liza-May Jackson, who ran his upper-bracket ranch-style home in Halcyon's northeast section with an engaging amount of non-irritating efficiency.

Sunday breakfast being al-

ways considered something special, Liza-May had in readiness for Wilksby's appearance an opening gun of iced papaya balls, sprigged with fresh mint and damped with Lemon French Dressing. These were to be followed by Southern Corn Bread (*never put sugar in Southern Corn Bread*), and a casserole of Eggs New Orleans. This was a Creole fantasy involving a brace of otherwise blameless eggs baked on a bed of tomatoes, green pepper, onion, celery, seasonings, bread crumbs, and one removable bay leaf, the entire confection topped by an overlap of grated American cheese. Coffee, of course.

Before sitting down to this production number in his Florida room, Wilksby turned on a TV set in anticipation of the nine o'clock news. He had downed the papaya balls and was starting a cautious approach (they were sizzling hot) to the Eggs New Orleans when the news came on. National and international problems were skimmed through with headline brevity, punctuated with a tastefully diagrammed sure cure for athlete's foot.

Then the local news took over in a shock wave that froze Wilksby with a forkful rigid in midair.

"...This just in—police have

reported the suicide of one of Halcyon's most honored citizens, Mr. Edmund Helber. It has been tentatively suggested that the tragedy occurred sometime between the hours of five and six this morning at the palatial family estate of Trianon. Although Chief Criminal Investigator Driscoll of the Sheriff's Department refused to divulge any known motivation for the act, it was learned from one of the servants that a blackmail and extortion note has entered the picture. This station will bring further details as they become available. An easterly wave off the Lesser Antilles..."

Wilksby, while not exactly tottering, managed to reach the set and turn it off midcenter in a suggested would-be aphrodisiac effect resulting from the use of an underarm deodorant. He cancelled any further thought of breakfast and going out to the garage got into a solid, no-nonsense sedan and headed for Trianon.

He had rarely felt more deeply shocked. That Edmund, the paragon, should have committed suicide was bad enough; but that the motivation should have been blackmail and extortion only added the gall of some hidden form of disgrace to the act. How far preferable, for example, would have been

an incurable disease, the lingering torture of which Edmund had not had the courage to face!

Wilksby considered it fortunate, owing to mutual membership in several civic organizations as well as legal trials in which both had participated, that he and Stuff Driscoll were on the friendliest of terms. Wilksby hoped to use this leverage to soft-pedal as far as possible whatever shameful motivation for self-destruction Edmund's might have been.

On reaching Trianon, Wilksby realized from the number of law-enforcement cars parked in the chateau's stone-paved courtyard that the investigation was already in full progress. A small cluster of news- and cameramen blocked him at the patrolman-guarded entrance door.

He parried their questions with an honest stance of total ignorance, identified himself to the guard, and was admitted into the impressive entrance hall. He asked the patrolman where he might find Driscoll and was directed to Edmund's suite.

En route to this wing of the house Wilksby met Dr. William Ainsworth, the county Medical Examiner. They paused for a brief exchange.

"I suppose there's no doubt?" Wilksby said.

"Of suicide? Not a shadow of one. I'm completely satisfied. Classical case of suicide, including hesitation marks—in fact, a suicide for the textbooks. Of course, Stuff—" Ainsworth's deceptively Byronesque lips broke into the thin smile that his female patients found so fascinating—"well, you know Stuff, Mr. Wilksby, and his ever-present little doubts."

"He isn't convinced?"

"Let's say he is convinced up to ninety-nine per cent. Personally I think he's just straining at a gnat."

Wilksby pondered this one per cent enigma of hope as he continued toward Edmund's quarters. Hope of what? Accident? Murder? With a wrench he realized how preferable to a verdict of suicide even murder would be.

He found Stuff alone in Edmund's study, going through some papers at a desk.

"I hope you don't mind my butting in," he said.

"Mr. Wilksby." Stuff stood up and shook hands. "Glad you came. There are some things I've wanted to ask you."

"A wretched business! In a way it's a good thing that Stoneface is dead. It would have killed him. You have no idea, Stuff, how deeply the old man regarded Edmund."

Both men sat down, the aging one and the younger. Each felt for the other a solid respect.

Wilksby said, "I ran into Bill Ainsworth on the way here. He tells me you have, as he puts it, one lingering per cent of doubt."

An expression that his wife Vi called his "Rodin look" settled on Stuff's agreeable face. He found it difficult to put his disquietude into words. Balance the pros and cons, and the weight lay preponderantly on Dr. Ainsworth's emphatic conclusion of suicide. And still . . .

He said, "You know how these things are, Mr. Wilksby. There are certain reports I want from the lab. I still have to talk with Saltus Helber—got him parked over in his quarters away from the Press. Then there's that artist fellow out in the studio—yes, there are still some angles to be cleared up before things are set."

"Anything—special?"

"They're all fairly special. There's the extortion note for one. I want to know who concocted it and tossed it onto the table—while Edmund was eating breakfast."

"Look here, Stuff. I know nothing but what was said on a brief newscast. Exactly what did happen?"

Stuff told him in digest, while a shock of repugnance ran through Wilksby at the implication of perversion.

"It's even worse than I imagined," Wilksby said. "I find it hard to believe. Very hard."

"I do, too," Stuff agreed. "I knew Edmund fairly well. My wife's opinion of him is the same as mine, a high one. She goes to those art classes he held at his Salle des Inconnus. I'm going to do my damnedest, Mr. Wilksby, to get to the bottom of this. To me it just doesn't ring true."

"Any way I can help—but you know that, of course. You did say there were some things you wanted to ask me. What about?"

"About Trianon. About the Helber estate in general."

Wilksby reserved nothing. Just how all of it would help he did not know. He offered a synopsized version of Stoneface's will, underlining the stepbrotherly situation of Edmund as the judge of Saltus' character and as the controller of the purse strings. He indicated Edmund's status as the final arbiter whether Saltus should inherit or not when, eight years from now, Saltus attained his thirtieth birthday.

"All that, of course," he said, "is now washed up. Edmund's dead."

"Yes," Stuff said, "I can see how it's all apple pie for Saltus from now on in. No more trust fund, no more restrictions. All shackles off, and a cool three million dollars to go to town with."

"Unhappily, that is the picture."

"How about Edmund's half of the estate? I suppose he left a will?"

"He had me draw one up about a month ago, shortly before a weekend he spent at some art festival or other in Vermont. He flew there and his father's fatal plane crash must have been on his mind. Anyhow, as a precaution he wanted to insure that his half of the estate would end up furthering what had been Stoneface's wishes."

Wilksby blew his nose trumpet fashion into a paper handkerchief. "Lots of good in the boy in spite of the other wretched business. Yes, there was plenty on the credit side of Edmund's ledger—plenty to be proud of. Oh, well!"

Wilksby rejected the soothing bromide that we can't all be perfect and sank into a brooding morass steamed over with deaths by violence and the miasmas engendered in secret vice.

"Just what is in this will of Edmund's? Mind telling me?"

"Not in the least. Briefly, there are a few minor bequests, an endowment for the continued operation of the ~~Salle des Inconnus~~, and the main bulk goes into a trust—myself, incidentally, as executor—for establishing a Cultural Foundation along parallel lines with the one outlined in his father's will."

"How about the minor bequests?"

"The only one that might interest you—and it's not so very minor, come to think of it—involves a hundred thousand dollars, tax free, that Edmund left to his latest protégé, Oscar Fortisman."

"Interesting. And unfortunately suggestive."

"No, it's completely understandable. Perfectly in line with Edmund's character. He told me he felt that he'd lifted Fortisman from his normal socio-economic status into a higher one of implied financial security and comparative luxury. Edmund simply didn't want an accidental death—you must remember that a possible plane crash was on his mind—well, he didn't want the props knocked out from under a man over whose career he had assumed a definite responsibility. Make sense to you?"

"Having known Edmund, yes. But I'm not the general

public. How they're going to interpret the gift if the papers should publicize it you know very well. I'm wondering whether Fortisman knew about this."

"I haven't the slightest idea. But I doubt it."

"It's a provocative angle any way you look at it. I think I'd better take a walk over to the studio and have a chat with young Oscar right now."

Both men stood up.

"I'll be with Saltus," Wilksby said.

There was a curiously un-lived-in air about Saltus' suite. It remained static as the prominent interior decorator ("impressed" upon Stoneface by his high fees and burnished elegance of manner) had arranged it: basically French Provincial with a few screamingly daring accents. Saltus had teened in it, attained his majority in it, and had imprinted no personal touch whatsoever.

Any amateur psychiatrist could have tossed the answer to this easily over his left shoulder: Saltus loathed Trianon. The reasons could be academically glib—he had respected his mother Diana as being a charmingly enameled, double-dealing, successful gold digger; he had feared and yet

admired his stepfather Stoneface even while seeking with irritatingly provocative acts to gain his attentions; he had cordially envied and detested his stepbrother Edmund. Result, the house meant nothing to him beyond a stone-walled stopping place for bed and board.

Largely, all this handy jargon was perfectly true, and had Saltus been penniless during his late adolescent years it might have been unbearable. A meager inheritance from his real father and an allowance given him by Diana had left him reasonably independent so far as pocket money went. It had offered a slender escape valve from the Trianon environment.

For such of his private diversions as required the cooperation of a member of the opposite sex he had secretly established an inexpensive pied-a-terre. At least (again the amateur psychiatrist talking) that was the conscious reason for his having acquired it. His subconscious, however, said differently.

What he had deeply wanted, and what he got in the rented cottage on the outskirts of Halcyon's southwestern section, had been a refuge that he could identify as being strictly his own. A place where, secluded from any close neigh-

bors, he and his actions would be individual in their own right. He had even assumed a second identity in connection with the haven, using his father's name of Hilderstone and renouncing the adopted one of Helber.

This cottage, this own true *home*, was brought forcibly to Saltus' mind when Josef, the Swiss butler, came to the suite at half-past nine with a Special Delivery letter. Startlingly, Saltus found it signed Seraphine—a misnomer if ever there was one. Seraphine had been the co-occupant of the cottage for the past several weeks. She was a ripe, comfortably unintellectual young woman who worked as a semi-nude barmaid in Halcyon's Barracuda Club. When not otherwise employed.

The letter was startling because the envelope was addressed to Mr. Saltus Helber—not Hilderstone.

Saltus baby (Seraphine had written), the old Scrooge stopped in to remind you that the rent was over-due and would you kindly snap out of it and come across. I would have paid but I need the scratch for a trip to my aunt in Tampa to who I am off to for a sudden visit of a week or more or maybe to stay there for a while. I am sending this special delivery because tomorrow is a

Sunday and I would not wish you maybe to come here and find the joint empty without reason. I did not use your alias of Hilderstone but used your real name and your real address which you should be more careful about letting letters addressed to you lay around in your jacket pockets if you wanted to keep them secret from snoops. Well, it has been fun, baby, but as Puggsy says (he is driving me to Tampa in his Yale blue Caddy) there is nothing like greener pastures to keep a young girl young.

Seraphine

Having gone through the upsetting strain of murdering his stepbrother less than five hours ago, this abrupt defection of his latest inamorata on the Cadillac wheels of a Puggsy—whoever under the sun *he* was—was too insignificant barely to think about. Seraphine's pocket-exploratory discovery and her use of his real name could have been dangerous, in a blackmail sense, had Edmund still been alive and riding herd over Saltus' morals and future wealth.

But Edmund was dead and the slave days were over and done with. Saltus was a free man. A very rich free man. A very clever very rich free man—for he had accomplished

the impossible. He had committed the perfect crime.

There was no doubt whatever in Saltus' mind that this was a fact. Dr. William Ainsworth, the Medical Examiner, had pounced on the "hesitation marks" with professional acumen and, with the extortion note's indication of palpable motive, had proclaimed Edmund's death a suicide beyond question. And that bright-brain, Ivy-league type, button-mouthing Driscoll had tacitly agreed. No slightest hint of any contradiction had passed the man's courteously sympathetic lips.

Well then, Saltus began to wonder with a growing touch of impatience, why the delay? Why didn't the pack of them clear out, with their cameras and camel's-hair brushes and peerings, and heaven knew what? But after all, Saltus decided, with such a prominent corpse as Edmund Helber it would be almost obligatory to make a spectacular out of the job.

His thoughts flicked back to his *pied-a-terre*, now obviously emptied of any female companion, and he weighed the advantages of either keeping the place on, or due to his new wealth and freedom of action giving it up. Better keep it, he decided. It would come in

handy for one-night stands.

There was a knock on the door and he called, "Come in." He expected it would be dreamboy Driscoll, but it was Artemus Wilksby who entered.

A surge of pleasure, almost one of power, swept over Saltus. No longer was subservience necessary on his part in regard to Wilksby. He, Saltus, was now in the Helber saddle and there wasn't one solitary abusive thing that the sour old goat could do about it.

Saltus decided, however, to maintain an outward show of deference, appreciating that the dissolution of the trust was in Wilksby's hands and that the antagonistic ancient blister could either speed or dawdle the settling.

A few shallow affectations of distress were kicked around and disposed of before Saltus got down to brass tacks. He asked Wilksby with an air of commendable deference whether he was right in assuming that the trust no longer obtained.

"Yes," Wilksby said, "as of the moment when Edmund died your share in your stepfather's estate became unconditionally yours."

"I imagine, however, there are certain formalities, sir?"

"There are. Certified accountings—papers for signatures—but nothing excessive."

"How about inheritance taxes?"

"They do not obtain in regard to the trust. As for Edmund's estate, he left you nothing, so there'll be none."

"He informed me of that fact, sir, after he had arranged with you to draw up his will. Just how does Trianon now stand in the picture?"

"After probate it will be put up for sale, the proceeds to be included in the Cultural Foundation. You can, if you wish, buy the property for yourself."

"Me?" The mask momentarily slipped. "Rattle around in this penal monstrosity? Believe me, I've got other plans, Mr. Wilksby."

"I do indeed believe you, Saltus." Wilksby's voice was acid. "However, there is no question of having to leave here or moving out for a long while. A property of this size and value, especially in this unfashionable location, is a white elephant."

"And the dissolution of the trust, sir? How long will that take?"

"A matter," Wilksby said with a grimace of distaste at this open avidity for grabbing the cash, "of days. Now about the funeral, Saltus—"

"The what? Oh, yes."

"I'll make the arrangements, if you wish."

"I'd appreciate it, sir."

"Under the miserable circumstances they should be as private as possible and the details withheld from the Press. I will see that the interment takes place as soon as the body is released."

"Released?" A thin, almost negligible sliver of ice touched Saltus' nerves. With suicide an accepted fact, what else? "How do you mean released?"

"Autopsy—inquest—formalities, of course."

"Oh—of course." Yes, they would comprise the frills of the spectacular. Publicity for the Sheriff's Department with their crown-jewel Driscoll in the limelight. The careful hounds meticulously pirouetting through their bag of tricks for a greedy little moment in the public eye.

No danger, Saltus decided. Impossible that there could be, no matter how probingly they carved his stepbrother up.

He said again, "Of course."

Stuff Driscoll left Oscar Fortisman and the protégé studio in a very thoughtful frame of mind. As he walked toward the main house along a pathway fringed with tall hibiscus, he was more deeply concerned than ever with the possibility that murder had been deviously and cleverly done.

And if he was right, there was every probability that the murderer would get away with it.

There was the rub.

Even if he was right, he needed proof.

Clear-cut evidence that would convince Jerry Atterbury, the County Prosecutor, that a Grand Jury would hand down an indictment. Clear-cut in the face of Bill Ainsworth's official insistence as Medical Examiner that any verdict other than suicide was simply reaching for the moon. The thought caused Stuff to smile. The venerable cliché no longer held water: the moon had been reached if only, to date, with a couple of cruel smacks against its inoffensive and romantic face.

He reviewed his so-far slender handful of pointers. It was indicative enough for him. For Atterbury, no. For Ainsworth, no. For a Grand Jury, decisively no. It needed weight—tangible flesh on its skeleton bones.

Would the killer have to be driven from his overconfident sense of success and security into some overt, self-incriminating act? Was it along those lines that the case must develop? A psychological sniping with verbal bullets, each one depositing its festering virus of doubt,

exposure, finally of panic? And then—?

A trap.

That was the answer—a trap.

The pathway, private within its sheltering hibiscus hedges, skirted the northern border of Edmund's patio before forking toward the highway in one direction and toward the entrance to Edmund's wing of the chateau in the other. Stuff paused at the fork and looked through interstices in the shrubbery, out across the patio, and focused on the French doors through which the extortion note had been tossed.

If, Stuff thought, a chance passer-by—no, a passer with a purpose—

He filed the thought, and pushing through the hedge, crossed the patio and went into Edmund's suite. Edmund's body was gone to Memorial where Ainsworth would handle the post mortem. The technicians were finished, their gadgets packed to go. Stuff had a word with a lab man regarding certain exhibits that were specified for analysis. Perhaps the oddest among these objects designated was a crumpled ball of facial tissue.

Stuff then issued a blanket dismissal, with the exception of one patrolman to stand guard in a roving assignment against curiosity seekers and the Press.

Then, alone, he went to a desk telephone and put through a call to his Fort Lauderdale home.

"Vi?"

"Yes, Stuff?"

"I'm at the Helbers'. I'm afraid the luncheon date with Hal and Jenny is out. Explain for me, will you?"

"Of course." Vi had been breakfasting with Stuff when the call had come through linking suicide and blackmail with Edmund, and ordering Stuff to take over. She had been incredulous. She remained so. "Dear, is it true? The suicide angle, I mean. It's so abysmally out of character for Edmund."

Stuff said noncommittally, "Bill Ainsworth insists there's no doubt about it. He called it a classical case."

"And is there a blackmail and extortion note aimed at Edmund?"

"There is."

"Women? A fire-breathing husband? It's too silly!"

"Not women, Vi. Gent protégés. The latest one specifically."

"Oh, no! No! I simply don't believe it. It's a despicable frameup, some rotten joke."

"No joke about his throat being cut, Vi."

"I know, and knowing Edmund as we both knew him it just doesn't make sense."

"Granted. Just the same, it's about the most pat open-and-shut case I've ever come up against. On its surface."

Vi said fiercely, "Then dig."

"I'm going to. I'm about to have a chat with stepbrother Saltus."

"That hypocrite!"

"Why the vehemence? You almost sound as though you'd had a run in with him."

"By proxy, yes."

"What do you mean by that?"

"There's a woman I know who's in the art class with me. Helen Ascerton. She's an assistant librarian at the Halcyon Public Library. She's nice, very nice, but sort of gushy. She's a pushover for faces. Thinks they show true character—angels, devils, you know the routine. You couldn't convince her in a hundred years that they could be masks."

"We're approaching, one presumes, Saltus' face?"

"Sidestepping the sarcasm, dear, we are."

"At the Salle des Inconnus?"

"No, at the library."

The tentacle of a thrill brushed Stuff. "Saltus?" he said skeptically. "At the public library?"

"My own reaction exactly."

Stuff's voice edged on a certain sharpness. "When, Vi? When did this miracle occur?"

"Little over a week ago. Helen Ascerton wasn't specific, and do I gather from your tone that the incident might have some significance?"

"Might. Let's have a few details, please."

"In the first place, the library's air conditioning had broken down and the building was like a Turkish bath."

"So?"

"So visitors were scarce as hens' teeth. Whereupon on three successive blistering days enter that alleged unregenerate cultureless stepbrother of our Edmund, one Saltus Helber."

"Well?"

"Stuff, you know as well as I do from remarks of Edmund's that Trianon is as loaded with literature as the Halcyon Public. Probably more so."

"I see the point. And Miss Ascerton didn't?"

"She did not. She burbled to Edmund about it at the art class while he was giving me a critique on that stiff life composition I'm doing. She drizzled honey about how wonderful it was that Saltus was 'seeking some drafts at the bibliophile's font'—her words, not mine."

"I should hope so."

"Edmund, poor lamb, swallowed it whole. He loved it. A new-leaf-for-Saltus sort of thing. It never struck either of

them as an act put on by a Grade A hypocrite. In that heat it had to be. Any sipping at the bibliophile's font could have been done right at home in Trianon's library with air-conditioned comfort. I suppose this is all pretty trivial."

"It isn't. Tell me, did your starry-eyed Miss Ascerton happen to notice what Saltus was reading? The odds are on *Lolita*."

"No, Edmund asked her that. All she noticed was that he stuck to the research stacks. Some large book with a dark green cover. Non-fiction."

"My dearest Vi, both you and Miss Ascerton are angels. Kiss both of you for me, please. And now, goodbye."

During the quarter hour that followed Wilksby's departure, Saltus indulged in a flush of anticipated acquisitions that ranged from a jet-streamed convertible through a beauty contest assortment of *chere amies* to a speculative house-boat patterned on the elegancies of a Cleopatra's barge. This agreeable dream-world was shelved when Stuff Driscoll knocked and was asked to come in.

Saltus initially detected nothing in Stuff's greeting other than a continuation of the sympathetic-social that had

marked their earlier encounter. He suggested that Mr. Driscoll sit down and Stuff sat. He suggested an early eye-opener of Scotch, bourbon, vodka, or what would you, which Stuff declined.

Saltus then began to sense a subtle change and caught a momentary impression, considerably offbeat, that Stuff resembled a cat. Not a domestic cat, but one of the large feral variety. A hunter cat. Very slowly Saltus' muscles and nervous system started to tighten. He had always been sensitive to atmosphere, to a prescience of anything inimical to his interests or his security, and this aptitude—call it ESP or whatever—was shimmering a warning in the air.

"Could you tell me, Mr. Driscoll," he said with a crocodile approach toward solemnity, "just when we might arrange to have Edmund buried?"

"I should imagine any time from tomorrow on, Mr. Helber."

"Mr. Wilksby has been kind enough to take over the arrangements. I'll let him know. He suggested, incidentally, the probability of there being an inquest?"

"That, I should say, will be held before Justice Harling Haverstalk. Probably around

next Tuesday. Of course you'll be formally notified."

"It does seem a lot of red tape for a suicide."

"Yes, doesn't it?" Stuff agreed pleasantly. "It's obligatory, however, with any unusual death—suicide—accidental—" he permitted a slight hiatus before adding, "'—or murder."

Saltus caught the hesitant break, and a tiny fissure occurred in his shell of absolute confidence. He said, "Even where there is no doubt, Mr. Driscoll?"

"Even then. Also, there is the matter of the attempted blackmail and extortion to clear up. Can you suggest anyone among your stepbrother's associates who might be responsible?"

Saltus succeeded in giving the impression of a lapse into deep thought, while the shimmer of warning increased in tempo. Without having attached importance to it one way or the other, he had imagined that official interest in the threat note would evaporate once Edmund, its target, was dead. The naiveté of this belief had never struck him.

He decided to toss Stuff a fish.

"My bet," he said, "would be on Oscar. You could figure that he either got tired of his

pretty-boy role, or it could be that Edmund threatened to cut that crazy hundred grand bequest out of his will, and Oscar decided to cash in on blackmail."

"Interesting that you should say that, Mr. Helber."

"Yes? Why?"

"Because a potentially explosive situation did seem to exist—at least, to Oscar's way of thinking. It was neither of the things you suggested, however. No, it was the fact of his secret marriage, and Oscar's fear that Edmund might learn about it."

"His what?"

"Oscar married a Miss Stella Linland two weeks ago. They agreed to keep it secret, Oscar told me, because of your stepbrother's aversion to any outside influence whatever intruding on Oscar's concentration toward his one-man show in December. I understand that your stepbrother was pretty explicit and mandatory on the point, explaining it was entirely in Oscar's best interest."

"That was Edmund, all right. I've had my own dose of the 'best interest' treatment."

"Then you will understand Oscar's concern," Stuff added almost negligently. "That's why his wife only came late at night to stay with him in the studio—when your stepbrother would invariably have retired."

"She stayed there nights? All night?"

"So Oscar tells me. Quite understandable, really—first flush of young love and all that. She'd park her car off the highway where it would be concealed behind brush, then walk to the studio along that pathway that passes your stepbrother's patio. It would generally be around daybreak when she would leave."

Stuff's eyes rested casually on the paling of Saltus' face. The point of the poniard had evidently pricked in. He shoved it deeper. He said, "She was there, as usual, last night and left the studio between five and six this morning. Of course, you can see how valuable that might be for us."

"I'm not quite sure that I do."

"It's valuable because of what she might have seen as she went along the path that skirts your stepbrother's patio—some glimpse, perhaps, of the person who threw in the blackmail note."

A highly unpleasant sense of suffocating was strong in Saltus, but he managed to speak in a fairly normal tone. "Surely, if she'd seen anything like that wouldn't she have raised an alarm? Run back to the studio and told Oscar about it?"

"Not necessarily. Not if she

had only glimpsed the person and not the act itself. Just the sight of a man, say, moving about in the patio would mean nothing more to her than that he was some friend of Edmund's. No, what I'm hoping for, if she did catch sight of anyone, is to get a description."

Stuff paused, then went on easily, "Questioning her will have to wait until tomorrow morning. Today being Sunday, she's not working—she's an instructress in a physical culture salon for women—and Oscar tells me she planned to visit friends in Pompano, possibly to spend the night. They're not mutual friends and he doesn't remember their names beyond his wife referring to them as Alice and Jack—down from the north on a brief vacation. Anyhow, there's no compelling rush. Tomorrow will do."

Stuff looked at his watch. Just after ten. He smiled, and said, "This extortion business doesn't concern you, so don't bother even thinking about it. We'll handle it." He went to the door. "Right now I've got a lot of work to do. Again my sympathies, Mr. Helber. I'll keep in touch."

The strictures of it being a Sunday did not interfere with Stuff's activities during the balance of the morning. On leaving Saltus he returned to

the studio where he arranged with Oscar that Oscar get in touch with his wife. The song-and-dance he had given Saltus about Stella being in Pompano had been a purposeful fiction. He wanted both of them to join him in a strategy conference during luncheon at The Fish Tank Restaurant at noon.

Next, he drove to the Halcyon Public Library, routed out the day watchman, showed his credentials, and was admitted to the building. He was reasonably certain of the nature of the book he wanted, and equally certain that he had located it in a dark green copy of *Legal Medicine: Pathology and Toxicology* in the research stack. He convinced the complacent watchman that his official receipt would cover taking the volume out, and its ultimate return.

His next stop was the crime lab at HQ. He got the results of the tests he had asked for, and he was particularly grim at the report that Edmund's straight razor, the suicide weapon, had revealed only the victim's own fingerprints, made while Edmund had held the razor handle during shaving—his fingerprints and nothing else.

This proved to his satisfaction that suicide could be thrown straight out the win-

dow, and murder let in. He reflected, as he had so often reflected, on the ridiculous fact that murderers could make the most intricate, the most devious plans, and then ruin them by a neglect of the obvious.

He left the copy of *Legal Medicine, Pathology and Toxicology* to be gone through for fingerprints, with special attention to be paid to Chapter 15, particularly the Cuts or Incised Wounds section of it.

The morning by now had advanced to 11:30.

Mrs. Stella (Oscar) Fortisman was a young woman who never would have stopped a clock, nor would she have launched a thousand ships: Which is a fancy way of saying that Stella, so far as looks went, was in the girl-next-door rather than the glamor galaxy.

On the other hand, Stella's physique was something extra-special, as testified to by a cluster of cups, medals, and trophies gleaned at tennis, swim meets, and exhibition judo. In the brains department she rated a solid A-plus, while among the more feminine pastures of romance her batting average could be compared to that of any major league pitcher who occasionally hits a single. With Oscar, however, she had scored a grand slam homer. They were

the ideal mates and as happy as two kittens in a catnip stupor.

That is, they were so until the personal implications of the extortion note (telephoned to Stella by Oscar, who brought her up to date on the Helber tragedy and issued Stuff's command-performance invitation for lunch) had sunk in. Stella's first reaction had been a short burst of laughter at its ridiculous absurdity; but then its probable effect on their rugged circle of beefy friends and on people in general had plunged her into an icy rage that still retained its sub-zero temperature when she was greeted by Oscar and Stuff at The Fish Tank.

The opening civilities were, as a consequence, somewhat strained. They melted a bit during shrimp cocktails when Stuff advanced his opinion that the extortion note was a frameup, completely false, and that he had every intention of proving it so. By then he had sized Stella up and had reached the conclusion that both physically and psychologically she would do excellently for the plan he had in mind.

He said, "Mrs. Fortisman, I want to give you a rundown on exactly how things stand. Around half-past seven this morning the Helber yard boy was giving his usual morning

checkup to Edmund's patio when he glanced through the open French doors of the suite's living room and saw Edmund's blood-spattered body seated at a table. For a moment he was horrified and in a state of shock."

"Should think he would be!" Stella said.

"Yes, anyone. He controlled his panic sufficiently to step into the room, go to a desk telephone, and call our department. He was given the familiar instructions not to touch anything and to stay put until a patrol car arrived. He took this literally and remained in the room without notifying either Saltus Helber or the staff. While waiting, he read the extortion note—later, incidentally, passing on a garbled version of it to a reporter."

"Just how big a deal will the papers make of it?" Stella asked.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Fortisman. The note will be fully exposed as a frameup by the time the case is closed. Now then, a cruiser reached Trianon within fifteen minutes and two patrolmen took over. I myself got there around eight thirty. I'm going to ask you to memorize some details of the scene. I'll explain why shortly."

"Nuts on getting Stella mixed up in this," Oscar said

thickly, both from emotion and a mouthful of lobster.

"Don't listen to him, Mr. Driscoll. I'll do anything you want me to that will help wipe out this smear."

"Just name me the bum responsible," Oscar insisted, "and I'll fracture him."

"I believe the plan I have in mind will be more effective," Stuff said. "When I reached the scene, Saltus Helber had been notified and was waiting with the patrolmen in Edmund's living room. He was wearing a dressing gown having a puce background on which there was an elaborate design of crimson dragons. Mrs. Fortisman, I'd like you to remember the description of that dressing gown."

Stuff then outlined the scenario of the crime much as Saltus had planned that it would be deduced—the tranquil breakfast scene, the note-covered rock hurled through the French doors, the shock, the spilled coffee, the horror at the note's contents, the getting of the razor from the bathroom, the return to the table to reread the note, the "hesitation marks"—then the suicidal slash.

"At least," Stuff finished, "that is the way we were supposed to conclude it occurred."

"But it didn't?"

"It didn't. The suicide setup was a complete phony"

"Why?"

"Simply, Mrs. Fortisman, for the reason that Edmund was already dead before that note was thrown in onto the table."

Saltus also lunched. At one o'clock he sat bleakly eyeing a platter of sandwiches he'd had Josef bring to the living room of his suite. Ever since Stuff Driscoll had left, Saltus' nerves had been flirting with panic over speculation as to if, what, or how much that painter slob's secreted wife might have seen when she had gone slinking away around daybreak.

He had tried desperately to convince himself that she would have seen nothing, and would tell Driscoll so when he would question her tomorrow. He had been reinforcing this shaky sort of solace with frequent assaults on a fifth of Scotch, and after downing two sandwiches and a couple more slugs he was almost at the point of feeling secure again.

The hour had reached half-past one.

The telephone rang.

He thought it would be Wilksby. Funeral arrangements. He lifted the receiver. It was a woman's voice.

"Mr. Helber?"

"Yes?"

"We haven't met," Stella said, then paused for an instant before adding, "but I think we should."

"Who is this?"

"This, Mr. Helber, is Oscar's wife."

There is a physical pain brought on by shock caused through sudden fright, and Saltus felt it. He said stupidly, "But you're in Pompano."

"No, I'm not. Oscar only thinks I am. You see, Mr. Helber, I feel that our meeting should be private—strictly private."

"I don't get it," Saltus said. But he was beginning to. The initial confusion was draining away and his inspirational flashes were clicking again. Blackmail. She *had* seen something.

His voice came under control, coldly polite, "Exactly what do you have in mind, Mrs. Fortisman?"

"I'm wondering if you might be free tonight? Say around ten?"

Saltus' instincts were now working at computer speed. "And I am wondering just where your husband fits in on this conference idea?"

"He doesn't. Not only doesn't, but mustn't. I'm sure that you understand me, Mr. Helber, that you realize how much safer it would be for you

if we keep this little get-together absolutely secret to ourselves."

Saltus' reactions to this palpably veiled threat were unprintable. The tramp, he decided, was out for it on her own. Even though she might be aware of the hundred grand that Oscar was slated to get, her problematic share of that would be peanuts compared to the slice she could gouge out of Saltus' three millions for her own private loot. The piracy, even the probable throwing overboard of a newly minted husband, did not strike Saltus as being in any way bizarre. It was exactly what *he* would have done under similar circumstances.

Truly, this threat, with a below-the-belt sock, contained a trembler that held the potential of developing into a cataclysm that in turn could tumble his brilliantly successful edifice into rubble. With himself a designated murderer under it. Suddenly Saltus' skin had the feel of wet ice.

He said, "You make me curious, Mrs. Fortisman. How about a few definite details? Why be so cryptic?"

"Let's keep it that way for the time being, Mr. Helber. We can leave the details until this evening. Just where do you suggest we meet?"

A plan, still nebulous, sprouted in Saltus' feverish mind. He accepted without question the thought that this wretched creature, this female Jesse James, represented a deadly danger to his existence, and fright was now being supplanted with a calculating anger.

He said with an effect of resignation, as though complete capitulation had been achieved, "Trianon, I suppose, would be out of the question?"

"Obviously. Let me repeat that *no one* other than myself is concerned in this—let us say, in this proposed arrangement."

The plan, still tenuous in form, was beginning to take more solid shape as Saltus caught an inspirational mental image of the *pied-a-terre*, now void of Seraphines or any other occupancy. Good seclusion and established privacy were offered by the cottage in its outskirts' setting.

He said, "Have you a pencil and paper handy?"

"I have."

"There's a cottage that I rent for occasional use. It's in a fairly undeveloped area. I can assure you we would neither be observed nor disturbed."

"The address?"

"2760 Southwest Mimosa Drive. Can you find it?"

"Of course."

"At ten, then?"

"At ten."

The day had now reached two o'clock.

In a small conference room at Headquarters (to which they had gone from The Fish Tank) Stuff congratulated Stella on the manner in which she had handled her telephone conversation with Saltus. He then briefed her with explicit instructions covering her attitude and actions during the coming ten o'clock rendezvous at the cottage. He suggested that she submerge her girl-next-door appearance under the type of make-up and costuming that Saltus would expect a woman with blackmail in her basalt heart to present. He allayed Oscar's fears that Stella would be subjected to any personal danger, assuring him that the fullest protective measures would be arranged.

Before she and Oscar left, he gave Stella a Short Colt .38 revolver, having filled its rotating cylinder from a freshly opened box of cartridges, taken from a room holding an assortment of supplies maintained for just such special assignments.

After they left, Stuff put through a call to Wilksby.

"Stuff here," he said when Wilksby answered.

"Oh, yes, Stuff?"

"Need your help, Mr. Wilksby."

"It's yours."

"I'd like Saltus Helber to be pinned down this afternoon for a couple of hours—say, between three o'clock and five. Either at your place or Trianon. So long as he stays put."

"I—yes, I think I can arrange it. Where are you now?"

"Headquarters."

"If I can get him on the phone I'll call you back in a few minutes."

"I'll be here."

While waiting, Stuff arranged to have a search warrant procured for the domicile and premises located at 2760 Southwest Mimosa Drive.

Wilksby's return call came through promptly.

"It's all set, Stuff. Dangled a quick dissolution of the trust before him. Handed him the line that if he would meet me at my office at three o'clock a lot of spade work could be got through. I suggested that I realized he was anxious to be in control of his inheritance as soon as possible, so I didn't mind making an immediate start."

"Can you hold him until five?"

"Simple as rolling off a log. I don't suppose—?"

"I'd better not say anything

more. It's a case, Mr. Wilksby, where ignorance is the more discreet form of bliss."

"Got you. Good luck, Stuff, and goodbye."

Before leaving Headquarters, Stuff went again to the room that lodged equipment for special assignments. He selected, and carried to the car with him, a broom.

From the outset there was no question in Saltus' mind but that he would have to kill Stella Fortisman. The assurance of this remained hot as a smoldering fire through the tedious couple of hours spent over dry documents and arid legal verbiage droned at him by Wilksby. It broke into little tongues of crafty flame after he left the old windbag's office and drove back to Trianon.

It being late Sunday afternoon, the staff had decamped for their evening off. Not one of them had been even slightly moved by the bromidic ties reputed to link loyal retainer with beloved master into giving up this timetable contract for the domestic pattern of modern days. Of course, had it been Saltus who had cut his own throat rather than Edmund they might have rallied round the bereaved hearth. They might even have thrown a backstairs fiesta.

The roving patrolman also had been called off—so what Saltus found on arriving was an empty house, which suited him fine. He decided to use the fact as an alibi for the evening's homicidal activities. In the improbable event that he should be questioned, he would simply state that he had remained at home in his suite, eschewing his notable rounds of ribaldry out of deference to Edmund's death. No one would be able to back him up in this, but neither could anyone prove he hadn't.

Of course there was Oscar over in the studio, but Saltus discarded him from his calculations. Rarely, he reasoned, had the bum ever come near the main house, and then only when summoned by Edmund. Saltus could think of no reason why he should do so tonight.

As a precaution, however, against any hundred-to-one chance, he got out a bottle of sleeping capsules and put it on his bedside table. He would say he had locked the doors to his suite, taken a couple of capsules, and slept soundly drugged, impervious to any knockings, until morning.

He was quite fascinated with such clever details, and congratulated himself on having come up with them. Thoughtfully, he revolved the better

ways for sending that unmitigated female vulture to her just deserts.

The simplest plan was to take his .32 Smith & Wesson revolver with him and pump her full of lead. The neighbors were remote enough so that any reaction to the sound of a couple of shots would be negligible, if not zero. They would dismiss them as backfires on the highway.

But no. The gun was registered in his name, and his library delving into Gonzales *et al's* handsome book had briefed him well on the dangers to the killer resulting from laboratory comparisons of rifling marks on, respectively, lethal and test bullets. His gun very definitely was out.

A knife? He'd rather not. Blood would be unavoidably involved, and as he intended to load the body into a car and dump it into a hyacinth-blanketed canal, any blood traces would simply offer an unnecessary danger.

Blunt force seemed most reasonable. Surely he'd find some object in the cottage that he could crack her skull with, and dispose of later when he sank the body. Then his inspirational flashes broke through and he thought of the garrote.

One of his nylon scarfs

folded loosely around his neck, to be whipped off and flipped around *her* neck—and bingo.

Ideal. Perfect.

All this cold-blooded ruminating had brought the evening to the twilight of seven o'clock. Three hours to go to post time. Saltus went to the chateau's elaborate kitchen and dug out the supper Josef had left for him under refrigeration. Chicken salad, mango tarts. He supplemented these with a bottle of Rhine wine and went right on ruminating, with the chill indifference of the totally amoral, while he ate.

He wouldn't use his own car which was a conspicuously flashy bucket-seat job, and while roomy enough for a live female companion would be exceedingly awkward for a dead one. The Trianon station wagon would serve best. It looked like any other of a thousand station wagons and would be most convenient for the stowage of Stella Fortisman's body.

The wine was comfortingly quieting the high pitch that his nerves had been operating on throughout the day. He even grew philosophically reflective, while munching a mango tart, and pondered the age-old problem of the curse of wealth. In his previous extended state of shallow economy nobody had ever had their hooks out to

sink into him, whereas now that he wallowed in money the gouge was on.

He consoled himself with the conviction that the wolves were only successful with the softies, with the Edmunds of this world. And just look, he thought dispassionately, where it had got Edmund.

He killed the bottle while speculating as to whether or not he should garrote the venomous Jezebel at the moment when she would step onto the cottage porch. He had no patience with the delayed action boys, a bit prevalent on the late-late TV, who dallied with dialogue through yards of self-exposition and vainglory before finally pulling the trigger.

On the other hand, he did seriously want to find out exactly how much of the daybreak performance she had seen or, more important, if she had passed any of it on. Yes, Saltus decided, better not be hasty. Better wait. And after all, no one knew of the rendezvous. With her artfully feline mind she would have attended to that. This he was convinced of. So time would in no sense be of the essence.

He glanced at his watch.

A quarter past eight.

If he shoved off, say, in an hour he could make the twenty-minute drive to the

cottage and still have plenty of time to check the building and grounds before ten, to make sure all was A-okay and the cottage and grounds truly emptied of Seraphine.

The cottage on Mimosa Drive was a wooden relic of Halcyon's earlier days when the tomato reigned as king. Originally, it had served as the modest homestead of a raiser of the then profitably grown love apples. Later, when salt seepage had rendered cultivating the crop inadvisable, the owner had sold out to a small speculator in real estate. The new owner, inelegantly maligned by Seraphine as a Scrooge, had done little in the way of development, and the cottage, as a result, had the fairly unique distinction of being surrounded by a considerable area of vacant land.

Night had closed in by a quarter of ten when Saltus left the Trianon station wagon at the rear of the cottage. He made a perfunctory flashlight tour of the immediate vicinity, weaving among a clutter of unkempt semitropical shrubs before entering the cottage by its back door.

He pressed a switch lighting up an old-fashioned kitchen, and satisfied that it was Seraphineless (she had a habit

of passing out cold in whatever locale she happened to be parked) he went into a moderate-sized living room where he lighted floor lamps. He opened the door of a closet in which Seraphine had stored her suitcases and saw that they were gone. The closet was empty except for a broom standing against a back corner and Saltus wondered, incredulously, whether she had gone haywire and done some sweeping up before she had left:

A bedroom and bath were devoid of herself and her clothes, and Saltus was satisfied that he and Stella Fortisman would have the place in safe seclusion.

He opened living-room windows for ventilation against the room's stored-up heat, pulled the curtains together, then stepped through the front door onto a screened porch. The radium-coated hands of his watch showed five minutes to ten. He sat on a camp chair to wait.

His fingers absently played with the loosely arranged nylon scarf around his throat.

Stella's arrival was heralded by the headlights of her car. The car drifted along slowly, hesitated, passed the house, stopped, then backed up. It turned into the driveway and parked at the porch door.

Stella got out.

"Mrs. Fortisman?" Saltus' voice came through the screening.

"Yes. Mr. Helber?"

Saltus held the porch door open.

"We're quite alone," he said.

"I felt sure we would be."

"Shall we go inside?"

"As you wish."

Light from the living room fell on her as they walked in, and Saltus found her much as he had expected the clever, conniving mate of a half-baked pro slugger would be. An overdose of mascara and blue shadow under her eyes had turned her into a travesty of any young lady predatory on the night. Her hairdo was barely offside from the fashionably absurd, and her dress had the tightness of a kid glove.

Stella took in the room. Curtains drawn at the windows. The doors and general arrangement of the furnishings were just as Stuff had described them during a second briefing that had been held earlier in the evening around six o'clock.

She said, "Handy."

"I've found it so."

"That I'd bet."

"Fix you a drink?"

"Maybe later."

Stella sat down at a table, placed centrally in the room where Stuff had said it would

be. She put a large coconut-fiber handbag on it. She waited until Saltus had sat down across the table, facing her. Then she opened the bag and took out the Short Colt .38 that Stuff had given her.

"In case you develop any ideas," she said.

The jolt that the gun gave Saltus threw him momentarily off balance. It was not so much the weapon itself—he had half expected that she would be intelligent enough to carry some concealed means of self-defense; but its immediate and bare-faced introduction into the game shook him.

He did not for a single second expect her to use it unless she was attacked. The last intention in her mind would be to kill the prospective goose with its golden eggs.

"Surely that isn't necessary," he said.

"Oh, no?"

"No." His face was a mask of cold politeness, while his brain geared into high. It easily grasped the formidable hurdles erected against any garroting while the gun remained, as it was, negligently pointing toward his middle.

Distract her attention—that seemed the best answer. Distract her attention to capture it—then—

"Shall we cut this pre-

liminary verbal fencing?" Stella said.

"Shortly." Surely the black spider wouldn't expect him to be gouged without knowing precisely what he was being gouged for. "The operative word," he said, "is *why*. Just why do you think, as you obviously do, that you hold all the aces?"

Her smile had the glacé texture of a winter's frost. "Perhaps, Mr. Helber, the description of a dressing gown might help? A somewhat conspicuous arrangement of crimson dragons on a background of puce?"

If there had been any doubt in Saltus' mind (there hadn't been, actually) as to her having seen something, it was now dispelled. But how much? And more important, *had she told?*

"The value," he said carefully, "of what you saw depends equally on how positively you can convince me that you have kept your mouth shut and will continue to do so."

The gelid smile remained.

"Isn't that a rather tacit admission that you did murder your stepbrother?"

"Oh, that!" Saltus said impatiently.

Somehow, in spite of the death-black eye of the revolver, he would kill this woman, so any admissions he might make

would be as useless to her as a brick of fool's gold. But the absolute assurance that she had not spoken was of vital importance to the future of his very existence.

"Of course I killed him," he said, then added petulantly, "You yourself would have under the same circumstances. Under the rotten, endless pressures. You're that sort of a woman."

"I suppose I am. So shall we get down to business, Mr. Helber?"

"Just what is your proposition?"

String her along, his brain said. Wait. Wait patiently for the opportune moment to bag that gun. Devise some incident when her attention would be distracted. And in the meanwhile, comply. No matter what she demanded, be a sheep.

"The proposition, Mr. Helber, is that you first get a sheet of paper and a pen from that desk over there and write as I shall dictate."

"Dictate what?" Goad her, his brain said, into spilling more. "Your only ammo is the description of my dressing gown. Any high pressure defense attorney could rip that into an ashcan."

She said negligently, "I doubt it. Not with an identification of your face added to it, at

the daybreak hour and in your stepbrother's patio. Not with your picking up a rock and tossing in the note. Not with the still discernible tableau of your dead stepbrother slumped on the breakfast table. Enough?"

He said nothing. His body, his brain felt bloodless at the extent of her knowledge, even while reason reassured him it would do her no good. Not when she was dead. In the turgid chocolate-colored water under hyacinths.

His hand crept with a gentle inching across the table toward the gun.

"Don't try it," Stella said softly. "This business of our being here alone, of no one being wise to it, can work two ways, you know."

"Be sort of unprofitable for you, wouldn't it? My death, I mean."

"It would. But not as profitless to me as being dead myself. Get the paper, Mr. Helber."

He went. He considered it time to adopt a beaten look. He let his shoulders sag after one helpless shrug.

"That's better," Stella said.

He took his time. He picked up a writing tablet from the desk. A ballpoint pen. He permitted his fingers to tremble, while warning himself not

to overdo it, not to ham it up. The woman was no fool. But neither, he thought savagely, was he.

He returned to the table. He stood abjectly across from this creature whose own nerves, he could see, were as tense as a tightly wound spring.

Now, he thought.

Careful—careful—now—

He placed the writing tablet on the table.

His fingers, still trembling, let the pen drop, and having given it a slight impetus it rolled rapidly toward the table's edge.

Instinctively—the reflex action was irrepressible—Stella reached to prevent the pen from falling off.

With a vicious grab Saltus snatched the gun from her hand and a hot bile of rage burst black in his head as he aimed and fired.

With a scream Stella clutched her breast and slumped sideways onto the floor, and Saltus, as she lay motionless in the table's shadow, fired two more blasts down at her body.

To make sure. To make absolutely sure.

Dawn broke before all the ends could be tied up, and Stuff at weary last was able to hit for Fort Lauderdale and home. His house, on the southern bank of one of the town's lovely canals,

was doubly welcome by Vi being on deck with percolating coffee—he had phoned her of his imminent arrival—and hot Danish pastry.

He summed up for her, as always, the general details of the case, not in their sequence but as he recalled them between attacks on the food.

—the gun he had given Stella had been loaded with blanks. Psychologically, he had been sure that Saltus, on her immediate production of the gun, would react just as he had reacted.

—at no time had she been without adequate protection. Before Saltus' arrival at the cottage Stuff and three deputies had been waiting a short distance back in the brush. After Stella's appearance they had moved in even closer—a deputy at each of the living-room's two windows, himself and the third deputy directly inside the kitchen.

I —the talk, and the outright confession by Saltus to the murder of Edmund, had been picked up by one of the newer electronic bugging devices—a broom, having a transmitter in the straw part and the antenna running up inside the broom's handle, all the talk being taped outside the cottage on a special receiver.

—the originating idea for the

"hesitation marks" had unquestionably come from *Legal Medicine: Pathology and Toxicology*; Saltus' sweaty prints were scattered throughout the significant Chapter 15.

—at the first shot and Stella's scream Stuff and the deputy had entered the living room, where the deputy succeeded in catching flashbulb pictures of Saltus firing the two succeeding shots down at Stella.

"That girl," Vi said, "must be composed of one-half Sarah Bernhardt and one-half Ethel Barrymore."

"She's a born actress, all right. Even though I knew the setup I got a chill when she let loose that yell."

"What Saltus got was probably a thrill of pure joy."

"Not when he spotted us it wasn't. He even emptied the rest of the blanks at the deputy and me."

"Superman stuff? Causing him to collapse when you two didn't?"

"Let's leave it at partial. The total collapse came when Stella rose up, as it seemed, from the dead, and he believed himself to be faced with a still-alive eyewitness to his daybreak high jinks in the patio."

"But can any of that be introduced in court as evidence? Isn't it technically entrapment?"

"Sure is, but there's the angle of his intended killing of Stella, documented with lovely pictures. My guess is that the prosecution won't even need it. After we booked and charged Saltus, he made and signed a voluntary confession that covers Edmund's murder down to the last dotted i or crossed t."

"Does it also clear Edmund and Oscar of that beastly charge in the blackmail note?"

"Completely." Stuff started on the last of the Danish. "It's a funny thing, Vi, but toward the end I got the impression that Saltus wanted us to appreciate how bright he'd been and to burst into applause. Bright!"

"Well, wasn't he? You said he had Bill Ainsworth convinced it was a classical case of suicide, and you yourself were on the ropes."

"Yes. But I changed my mind."

"Knowing you as I do, dear, I have the impression you've been holding something back for a grandstand finish. Just what was it that tipped you off?"

"Edmund's breakfast."

"Oh, now honestly, darling!"

"No, look, Vi—it was like this. I was watching the lab man wipe off Edmund's fingers with a piece of tissue before taking prints of them—for comparison

with the ones on the razor handle and on the extortion note."

"Wipe *what* off?"

"Ever eat a hot, toasted, thickly buttered English muffin?"

"You know I have."

"Well, that's what Edmund was doing when Saltus yanked his head back and cut his throat. It would have been just about impossible for Edmund to have held either the razor or the note without smearing butter on them. His fingers were coated with the hot, melted butter."

"And there was no butter on the handle of the razor?"

"The lab boys couldn't turn up the faintest trace."

"Maybe Edmund washed and wiped his hands—".

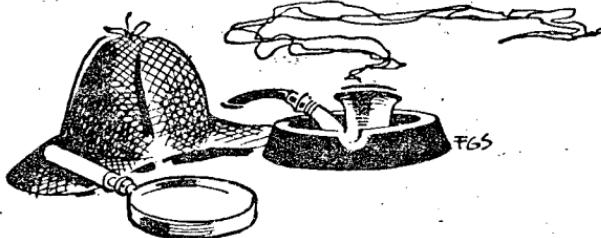
"Just before committing suicide?"

"No, of course not. He'd have been far too upset emotionally even to think of it. So it was not Edmund who held that razor. So it was murder."

"You know, Vi, this whole job of Saltus' makes me think of that proverb in the Old Testament—sort of covers all the eager-beaver bad guys who end by tripping themselves up."

"Couched, I'm sure, dear, in somewhat less colloquial language."

"Much less. It hits the nail smack on the head by simply stating, 'Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein.' "



Joyce Cary

The Sheep

Joyce Cary didn't decide to become a writer until he was past 30. He had studied art in Edinburgh and Paris but gave up a career in art even though he had become a fine painter. He had served in the Balkan War, been decorated, and had then joined the Nigerian Political Service, fighting with the Nigerian regiment during World War I and later being the only white administrator in a remote and primitive district in Nigeria.

His earliest attempts at writing turned into a prolonged and painful series of rewritings, and his first two novels, not published until he was in his mid-forties, were almost total failures. But by this time he saw his way, and persisted. Success, financial and critical, came slowly, even in England, and his work did not begin to appear in America until after World War II. But with THE HORSE'S MOUTH, A FEARFUL JOY, and A PRISONER OF GRACE, Joyce Cary finally achieved international recognition: he has been called one of the most distinguished of modern novelists, and perhaps the only English novelist who truly wrote in the tradition of Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy.

Elizabeth Janeway has said of Joyce Cary that no other contemporary writer "is at once so unsentimental, so rational, and so perceptive . . . who can combine the toughest-minded realism with mood and insight and character-drawing that is like a lightning flash."

You will find these qualities—tough-minded realism, perception, character-drawing—in this memorable short story by Joyce Cary. We wonder if any American author could have written this particular story; no, it had to be written by an Englishman . . .

Tomlin, having come in from the garden, settles down by the fire with his pipe and a paper. He has round him all the comforts of an old bachelor retired from business on savings, who understands exactly how to please himself chiefly by limiting his desires. His health, carefully nursed, his digestion, are perfect; at 65 he is still able to eat anything he likes. He does not, however, indulge himself in such things as lobsters, mushrooms, or elaborate savories, because, although he likes them, he suspects that they might be bad for him. He intends to enjoy his leisure for a long time still.

He opens *The Times*, ready for the keenest enjoyment of his day. He never reads *The Times* until evening, in order to have all day the pleasure of this anticipation.

Suddenly the phone rings. Like all old bachelors' phones, it is within reach from his armchair. He picks it up and hears a hoarse voice, "Willie, this is Peter."

"Who?"

"Peter—Peter. Don't tell me you've forgotten Peter."

"Peter?"

"Yes, Peter—Peter, P for pee, E for eats, T for tight, E for more eats, R for racket—Peter. Now, look here, old boy, there's something you can do

for me. And you're the ^{only} person who can do it."

"Excuse me—but are you sure you've got the right number?"

"Right number? You're Willie, aren't you? Willie Tomlin. Damn it all, old boy. This is PETER—Peter Blew, of the Somme. We were wounded on the same day. I must be your oldest friend."

Tomlin, casting his mind back 40 years, to the front line of the '14-18 war, does now recollect a Peter Blew, but with uncertain feelings. The vision that springs from some cavern of the past is of a young second lieutenant with a great deal of hair, a great deal of swagger, and a great line of blarney. According to himself, he can beat the bookies at their own game, and have any woman he likes on sight. He is, however, not very popular among his brother officers, being given to sponging, lying, bragging, cheating, and disappearing when there is work to be done.

It's true that they were both wounded on the same day. He remembers very well the base hospital where they lay in the same ward—Blew with a slight arm wound, picturesque and painless, Tomlin with two holes in his stomach, extremely ill. Blew is the darling of the nurses in a day, he keeps them in fits

of laughter with his wonderful tales. Especially about little Willie at the war. Little Willie in this case is Tomlin. And Tomlin, out of pure self-respect, must laugh also at these legends. To laugh, for him, is agony. And when he laughs Peter Blew makes a bleating noise and says, "Hear the dear old sheep."

This word sheep, as Blew knows, enrages Tomlin. It has pursued him from childhood when, in a large family, he was always the one to be ordered about, to take the part of Boer in a war game or horse in a bullfight. In those days he had never been without bruises, and his black eyes were so rich and numerous that they became a family joke.

His mother would say, "Poor Willie is so good-natured."

Willie himself did not accept this explanation. For he resented his fate. He longed to be the fierce hussar, killing people with a sword, the ruthless cold-eyed matador, the wild bull. But he never got a chance.

And here is this four-letter man Blew, a shyster if ever there was one, pinning him with the same tags.

It's not true and it's not fair. Why should Blew get away with it, with everything? It can't go on.

But when both come out of

hospital, Blew gets a job at the base. His Colonel, a prejudiced old regular, thinks he is better out of the front line, that for all his swagger and his trench knife, he lacks the offensive spirit, that he is deficient in something called leadership. Everyone has noticed that in the actual presence of bullets, Blew becomes modest and self-effacing.

Tomlin, on the other hand, is returned to the trenches as soon as he can stand on his feet. He is not very adventurous but his men will follow him anywhere. And he is wounded twice again before the end of the war.

He remembers even more vividly a meeting years after the war, with a red-faced fellow of 30 or so, who calls on him at Hammersmith. Tomlin is still living with his widowed mother in the family house, a small terrace house in a street just one step removed from the squalid. All the same, it has been a hard fight for Tomlin to keep this house for his mother. He is her only support. His father, a curate in this same parish, has died young of T.B. and general overwork at 52, leaving nothing but debts, themselves pitifully small.

His elder brothers and sisters, all prosperously married, are extremely sorry that the

expenses of their families prevent them from affording any help. He is lucky, they say, to be a bachelor and free from this terrible burden of modern family life for the professional man.

Tomlin resents their meanness—even though he does not particularly want to marry, he does not see why he should be deprived of the possibility. But, with this sense of injustice, he is all the more proud of his neat little house, so cleanly kept.

All the same, life is dull and he is flattered when Blew comes to call. He has forgotten his hard feelings of wartime and is pleased to see an old comrade, especially in such fine form. Blew is driving an enormous new shining Bentley and has with him three lovely girls in the latest summer frocks. He himself is in white flannels and a straw hat with the pink ribbon of a famous rowing club. It is Saturday afternoon, and the party is on its way to Henley. Blew, however, is apparently not in training. He is smoking a cigar and as he approaches Tomlin he breathes a strong flavor of whiskey.

Mrs. Tomlin, a small, rather shy woman of 60, has also come to the door. She is eager to welcome this rare visitor, a friend of her dear son's. She suspects that his life is dull, that

he is sacrificing for her more than she comprehends.

Blew introduces himself, "Major Blew—how do, Mrs. Tomlin," but at once turns to Tomlin and grasps his hand, "My God," he cries. "Dear old Willie—just the same as ever. What a bit of luck to find you. I knew you were somewhere round here and the milkman did the rest. I was sure he'd know—you always liked milk, didn't you?" And he goes into a shout of laughter and slaps Tomlin on the shoulder.

Tomlin is confused. What's this about milk? Then he remembers his diet at the hospital and is confused by his own confusion. He feels himself growing red.

The three ladies, gazing from the car with the most intense appreciation, burst into giggles and one of them cries, "Oh, you Pete, you are a one."

Tomlin now perceives that these ladies are very much made up, probably very far from ladies—also that Blew is swaggering before them at his, Tomlin's, expense. But he says to himself, After all, we were comrades in arms, and says, "Do come in and have something, all of you."

"Milk," murmurs one of the girls, and the whole three explode into helpless giggles.

"Thanks, old chap," says

Blew, "I'd love it, but the fact is we're late already. We had a bit of trouble at the start—argument with a bobby at a crossing—and now, damn it all, I find I've left my wallet on the piano. If you could cash me a check—"

The girls are now once more silent and gaze at the scene with fascinated eyes—the expression of spectators who wait to see a conjuror produce a gold watch from the ear of some country hick selected from the audience.

Tomlin is now growing embarrassed, not so much by Blew's bad manners, as by the mere presence of the man. There is something in Blew that not only disgusts but makes him feel uneasy, as men feel when they read of parcel bombs and are suddenly reminded of how much spiteful meanness there is in the world and how easily it gets away with every kind of malicious evil-doing.

Tomlin sees that Blew despises both himself and his mother who stands ignored and equally embarrassed in the doorway, uncertain whether to stay or go away. He wonders how Blew has become a Major; he had only been a Lieutenant at the end of the war. And he wonders also how he has become a member of Leander; he doubts very much if he

knows one end of an oar from the other.

He is very ready to cash a check for £5 to be rid of Major Blew, and he is not greatly surprised when the check is returned to him from his bank marked "Insufficient Funds."

But now, after all these years, having identified this oldest friend, he is not so patient. He answers him in a very cool voice, "Yes, I do remember you now—and also a check you gave me for five pounds."

"No doubt of it, old boy. I don't remember the check but I've always been a good friend to my friends—my real friends. Now look here, my dear old fellow, it's about Florrie; I'm terribly worried about her—"

"Florrie?"

"My daughter Florrie, my only daughter. My only child. Dash it all, you were devoted to Florrie. Don't you remember how she used to sit on your knee to say her prayers?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. I didn't even know you were married."

"Married? Who said I was married? What are you getting at? And what about that check? What check?" Blew is suddenly truculent. Tomlin remembers that when caught at cheating or lying, he was always extremely noisy and pugnacious.

He says, "I wasn't getting at anything. As you mentioned a daughter, I thought—"

"Well, that's it, old boy." Blew has decided to overlook the offense. "The poor little thing has no one but me—you can understand a father feels a special responsibility in a case like that. And I've done my best, God knows. But a man has his work, he can't be around all the time. And this is it, Willie—Florrie's bolted. This very day as ever is. Gone off with a chap from the village. A complete crook and welsher. But I've just found out where they're going—London. To Paddington by the 9:30. And if you get along now you'll catch 'em easy. You've forty minutes."

"But really, Blew—I never met your Florrie—"

"Wait a minute, old boy. Here's a kid of seventeen been got at by a crook—a real crook. He's a known bigamist. Did time for it under the name of Caffee. He's not only a crook but a stinker—owes money all round, and he drinks. If she goes with him she's finished for life. Imagine a kid like that—as simple as a newborn kitten. And all you got to do is go to Paddington and tell Florrie I'm coming up by the night train and will she just wait to see her poor old Daddy before taking

the high jump. Just wait a few hours, that's all. For Daddy's sake. And without prejudice, no commitments either side. Just put it to her.

"And if she says no, well, it can't be helped. It'll break my heart but I'll just have to take it. But she won't say no, old boy. You can rely on that. She's a good kid—she loves her old Daddy like he was her mother, too—it's just this crook has got round her or she'd never have done such a thing. She'll wait for me and thank you afterwards—thank you all her life. You can't mistake her. She's a light little thing—fair hair, bright blue eyes. Looks younger than she is—just a kid. And she's wearing a long green coat and a green hat. I don't know what he's wearing but he's a regular spiv type with a black mustache, and look here, my dear old chap, if he says a word, all you've got to do is call the police. You won't see him for dust—"

And Tomlin, not wishing to argue with the fellow, answers, "Sorry, but it's too late, I couldn't make the train. I've no car and this is rather a primitive kind of suburb. I doubt if I'd even get a taxi."

"No car and no taxi—that's a pretty thin tale. Do you realize you're the only man in the world who can do this for

me—save this poor kid from misery and shame? My God, Willie, if you're really going to quit on me I'll just chuck my hand in, cut my bloody throat: I haven't so much to live for—I've had a hard time in this life—but I still had some faith in friendship. I've said to myself, Damn it all, it's a rotten world but there are one or two decent souls left among the stinking dirt; there's Florrie and there's Willie Tomlin. And now it seems I was wrong there, too. Oh, hell, what's the good." And he rings off.

Tomlin sinks back in his chair. He thinks, "I'm well out of that. What a fantastic idea." He relights his pipe, reopens *The Times*, and seeks that evening bliss which has been interrupted.

But it has gone. His nerves are upset. He is deeply uneasy. He is ready to write off 90 per cent of Blew as cant, but he can't help feeling that the other ten is really in distress. After all, he is obviously fond of this daughter of his, and even crooks have hearts. He hears again that cry, "I haven't so much to live for." And he feels a pang; he is more and more shocked by his own selfishness. Here is a fellow creature in the midst of a desperate crisis, and all he does is to bring up against him a dud check, 40 years old.

He is quite astonished at himself. How has he grown so callous, so small-minded?

He wishes now that he knew Blew's address. He would ring him up and offer at least to make the attempt. Almost certainly there would be no taxis available, and if there were, it would be too late to intervene at Paddington. But he would like to show good feeling. Also he would like to do something to appease his nagging conscience.

Ten minutes later the phone rings and his hand stretches out automatically. Again the oldest friend's voice, "Hello, hello—Willie? Are you there? I've got you a hired car—it's coming for you now. A thoroughly reliable man. Drives like an ace. Don't forget to wrap up, old fellow. I remember your colds in the old days. And remember—soon as you set eyes on that chap Caffee and mention my name, he'll be off like a pickled rabbit. You've nothing to do but appear and say, 'Colonel Blew's friend—'"

"Colonel?" Tomlin says; and then hurriedly, in case he may be hurting Blew's feelings, "Right you are—I'll be there."

He is actually relieved. His soul is at peace. He feels like an heroic soldier going over the top.

But even before the car

arrives, he begins once more to see the difficulties of this undertaking. And they seem rather more formidable than German machine guns.

With a deep sigh he puts on his heaviest overcoat. He reflects that, after all, the whole affair will be over in an hour, and he'll sleep all the better for having done his duty.

Five minutes later he is on his way to Paddington in an ancient car, with all the doors rattling and a strong petrol leak somewhere, driven by a ruffian with a cigarette glued to his lip. Drafts blow in even through the floor, and Tomlin, who is indeed subject, not to colds but to lumbago, wonders where on earth the oldest friend has managed to hire such a miserable vehicle.

At the station the ruffian gets out and says to him, "You looking for Miss Blew?"

"Why, yes. Do you know her?"

"From a baby. And her guv'nor. Used to drive for him. Did the Derby with him five years running—as an amateur—down the course to beat the book—needs a quick getaway at times. Too quick for my liver and lights. Got a butt?"

Tomlin gives him a cigarette; he lights it with a thoughtful air and says, "A sporty boy, you might say."

In the next five minutes, while they wait for the train, which is late, he breaks the silence only once with a loud and peculiar laugh, something between a crow and a snort, and throws the cigarette, with some violence, across the platform onto the down line.

Tomlin offers him another cigarette from his pack; he makes a slight movement of his forefinger, the sketch of a salute, and takes the pack.

The train comes in, the ruffian plants himself by the exit gate, Tomlin hovers in the background with a wild idea—an idea he knows to be impossible—of losing himself in the crowd and going home by the underground. But there is no crowd. Only about 30 or 40 people come from the long train and at once he sees the ruffian approaching a couple walking rapidly down the platform.

The girl is hanging on the man's arm; the man is carrying a large brown suitcase. She is a very stout girl with a large snub nose, red cheeks, and small green eyes. She appears about 30. The man is a large and heavy thug with a purple face and a black mustache.

Tomlin, seeing nothing for it, goes up to the girl and says politely, "I beg your pardon. Miss Blew, I believe. I had a

phone call from your father."

The man answers for the girl, "Who the devil are you?"

"Colonel Blew phoned me and asked me to meet his daughter."

"I asked who the hell are you? What right have you to speak for Colonel Blew?"

"My name is Tomlin. I tell you Colonel Blew requested me to speak for him, as a friend."

The girl says, "Never heard of you."

The man makes as if to push Tomlin aside, "Here, you clear out."

Tomlin ignores him in a dignified manner and addresses the girl.

"Your father asks me to say that he is coming to town tonight and will see you tomorrow morning. He begs you most earnestly to take no irrevocable step until then."

"I don't believe a word of it," the girl cries. "Irrevocable step. What stuff. Daddy don't talk like that. What the bloody hell, anyhow. I know your sort—pestering respectable girls at railway stations."

And the man pushes up against Tomlin saying through his teeth, "Are you getting out or aren't you?"

Tomlin, determined not to have trouble, ignores this provocation and appeals again to the girl. "You must have

heard of me—Willie Tomlin. Your father's friend—his oldest friend."

Caffee pushes Tomlin a yard. "Here, what's your game? Do you want me to dot you one?"

Tomlin, more and more irritated by the idea that he has been let in by Blew for this ridiculous affair simply because he is Tomlin, pushes back vigorously and says, "Come now, don't be silly."

"Silly—we'll see who's silly."

"We don't want the police, I imagine."

"The police," bawls the other. "What you mean about the police?" and he tramps heavily on Tomlin's foot with his heel.

Tomlin loses his temper, loses it suddenly and completely. His whole infuriated soul demands why these spivs and crooks should make a fool of him and despise him at the same time, simply because he has some decency. He shouts at the top of his voice, "What do I mean, Mr. Caffee? You ought to know that better than I do. I haven't a record."

"A record? What you mean, record?" He aims a blow. Tomlin thinks, I'll show 'em who's a sheep, hits him flush on the nose and gets a punch in the ear. The girl shrieks, porters and a station policeman come running up and tear the pair

apart. Caffee is bleeding from the nose and claims justice. Miss Blew never stops swearing that Tomlin has started the whole thing and struck the first blow.

Tomlin is arrested. But he declares that Caffee is abducting this child, daughter of his oldest friend; he has reason to suppose that he is a bigamist. And the two men are taken to the cells, while Miss Blew shouts after them that they are beasts, brutes, and crooks, she never wants to see either of them again.

Next morning Tomlin, bailed out by a friend, goes home and finds the girl in possession. The ruffian has driven her to his address. She has spent most of the night in hysterics and is now drinking brandy to strengthen her nerves before getting up.

But she complains that if she gets up now she will not be able to eat—that scoundrel Tomlin has wrecked her health as well as her life.

Tomlin telephones for Blew, and he arrives at three. He enters bellowing Tomlin's name and slaps him on the back so hard that he makes him stagger.

He is now an extremely bloated person with a face mottled like newcut brawn, a lilac nose, and little bloodshot eyes. He is dressed in an old tweed coat, with leather elbows, and extremely tight and

dirty twill trousers. When he causes Tomlin to stagger he also staggers, shouting with laughter. He is in the highest spirits. He has been celebrating on the way and is in a fine glow of triumph. He claims full credit for the masterly scheme as carried out by Tomlin.

"Didn't I tell you it would be as easy as a Derby mug. I knew that rotten crook had no guts. You'll see, we'll hear no more from him." And he adds with deep satisfaction, "That'll teach him to welsh on the old Colonel."

Then he borrows a pound to pay his taxi, takes two more double whiskies, and goes upstairs to see his little darling. Immediately the door closes behind him a noise is heard like a dogfight between a mastiff at its last wind and half a dozen small neurotic terriers. The terriers yap, scream, howl without cease; the mastiff roars, moans, and gasps.

Finally Colonel Blew descends, rather redder and more swollen than before, and exclaims to Tomlin, "You've made a proper mess of things, haven't you?" falls in a chair and asks for a whiskey, which he takes neat.

"A proper bloody muckup," he says. "Poor Florrie—that poor child. Well, I suppose you didn't think. You're not a

family man; you dodged out on all that, too. How could you know how a girl feels in a jam like this—all her life's happiness down the plug. And as for me, as for my feelings—but no one ever thinks of this poor old soldier. I'd be a fool to expect it. My trouble is I wasn't born your sort, with insides like a fish and no sense of responsibility. What do you care if she's been crying her eyes out all night, poor little lamb? But all I can say is, keep away from her if you value your bits and pieces; she's all out to cut you off with a blunt bread knife."

He catches his breath, takes another gulp of whiskey. "Good God in Heaven, man, what got into you last night?"

"When—how—"

"Hitting that chap and calling names. You must have been mad unless you were tight. But I might have expected it. It's always the same with you half-alive chaps that stand from under. You're so keen on watching out for a drop of rain that you fall down the first open manhole."

"You told me he'd been in jail."

"That wasn't any reason to tell *him* so. That's libel, criminal libel. Don't you know your law? And what's more, old boy, it seems he didn't exactly do time, neither."

"You said he was a bigamist."

"And so he was," the Colonel shouts, "So he was—in the eyes of God. But it seems he didn't marry the girls—neither of 'em. And as for jail, he should have got there years ago but Florrie swears he's not actually been inside. I'm sorry, old boy, but how did I know you'd rush in like that without smelling out the ground? And now I really don't see how you're going to come off without a pretty stiff sentence. Criminal libel is a serious thing and so it ought to be. You can't go calling chaps crooks all over the place—not in England, and quite right, too. No, not even if they *are* crooks, as you ought to know. In England, the public has protection. Of course, you could go and apologize, but the question is, would he take it? Why should he? He holds all the aces and then some."

"You seem to have changed your ideas about Mr. Caffee."

"Bill Caffee! There you've got me wrong. I always liked Bill; we've been in several little things together. He has a wonderful eye for a horse, win or lose. A fine chap. All I worried about was would he make a suitable husband for my Florrie. Would he be able to meet his responsibilities and support her in the way she's

been accustomed. And I admit I doubted it, old boy. But it seems he's just brought off a double at Leicester. He's prepared to pay off all debts, debts of honor anyhow, and offer her quite a nice little home. And as for being suitable, well, it seems he's been suiting her already. The sooner they get hitched the better; it's urgent."

And within the next ten days Tomlin, having been censured and fined in court for an unprovoked assault on an innocent citizen, thinks himself lucky to escape further action for criminal slander by the humblest apologies to Caffee and £100 damages.

The Blews then forgive him. Blew borrows 100 pounds to pay for the wedding, and Caffee another £100 for the honeymoon. Miss Blew suggests that a silver tea service would be appropriate as a present, and, in fact, deserved, since Tomlin has so nearly wrecked her happiness. He compromises with an electric kettle, and is not asked to the wedding at a register office or the party afterward. But Mrs. Caffee thanks him from Monte Carlo for the kettle, which she spells *kettle*, and sends a formal card for a flat warming after the honeymoon, on the third of September, in a suburb 40 miles

away—the kind of invitation that expects immediate rejection. Tomlin answers with polite regrets that in September he will be away on holidays; and he adds that he always takes his holiday in September, after the crowds, for peace and quiet.

He writes this twice in draft and leaves it out again. He feels that it may sound like a reproach, even a dig. But finally he says, "Damn it all, why be so sheepish? If they take it wrong, let 'em; they deserve it. And after all, it does show why I can't come to the party, that I'm not just dodging their damn party." And he posts the letter, with dig.

There is no retort from the young couple. If they have understood his note as a dig they have taken it lying down. And he gets a certain moral satisfaction from his dig; at least, he has not let those undisciplined savages get away with everything. He has vindicated morality and now he can really enjoy his peace again. He has paid heavily for it.

And he doesn't intend to take any more risks. On the day, five weeks later, when he is to leave for his annual fortnight at Brighton, he tells his housekeeper when she brings his morning tea to give no one his address, not even if he says

he's a particular friend.

Suddenly there is the noise of a taxi at the gate, a loud and prolonged ring at the door. The housekeeper pulls an astonished face and goes downstairs. A moment later Mrs. Caffee charges into the room and cries, "Thank God, you've not gone yet."

She throws herself on Tomlin's chest, conveying to him a strong smell of gin. "That brute," she cries. "That liar and crook, he hadn't any flat, he hadn't any money, he hadn't any job—and he hit me. I've left him forever. I told him so. I said, 'You think you can treat me how you like because I've no proper home and nowhere to go. But you've forgotten Willie'."

Tomlin, appalled, mutters, "Your father—"

"Oh, Daddy—you know what Daddy is. You saw him. I phoned him last night and he told me to go to hell. All he wanted was Bill to pay him that ten quid. But I never expected anything from Daddy and I never got it either. Daddy's a hog. Besides, I shouldn't wonder if he wasn't my daddy at all. Mum only picked on him because he was tight—"

The housekeeper comes in with a still longer face. "Excuse me, sir, it's the taxi man; he wants his money."

"Oh, yes, I forgot," says Mrs. Caffee, "I haven't any money."

Tomlin, in dressing gown, goes down to pay the taxi man. As he passes his spare bedroom he hears a small baby crying. He stops in surprise and looks in. The baby, a very wet and dirty one, is lying on the silk eiderdown, lately re-covered. Seeing Tomlin, it screams still louder.

And suddenly Tomlin is again embraced. Again he gets that breath of gin. "Yes, it's little Peter. What else could I do—and I knew you wouldn't mind—you're so good—" And she sobs loudly, "A true friend—my only friend in the whole world. Just while I look around—just for the next day or two—"

But six months later she is still looking around. Tomlin has appealed to Blew but the Colonel has disappeared into Eire after some trouble about a horse that has changed its color from all black to brown, with three white socks, in a thunderstorm immediately after winning a race. All he has had from him is the bill from the ruffian for the drive to Paddington and back, forwarded with the note, "Why have you kept this poor chap waiting for his money? You're lucky he didn't sue."

There seems nowhere in the whole world for Mrs. Caffee and little Peter to go except the Institution or the streets. And though she seems likely to do well on the streets, though she knows already a great many men who call on her at odd hours to share Tomlin's whiskey, Tomlin can't make up his mind actually to throw her out. He knows that if he did so, he would never have another hour of peace.

The housekeeper has left, he keeps with difficulty an occasional charwoman, the house is filthy, the bills are awful. Tomlin has aged ten years; he takes pills before and after every meal. And he hasn't even the satisfaction of a good opinion of himself. For he has quite failed to like Mrs. Caffee.

He doesn't even take to the baby, which grows more and more like Caffee every day, even to the impudent loudness of its voice. What depresses him most is the feeling that the whole thing is ridiculous, that it wouldn't have happened to anyone else, and that anyone else would know how to put an end to it.

But one afternoon when Tomlin, sunk in such gloomy thoughts, is waiting for tea, already half an hour late, a taxi stops at the door. Tomlin is sitting in the window to put

himself as far as possible from Florrie, who, having at last come downstairs, is about to ring the bell. For Florrie demanded all the privileges of the house mistress, and Tomlin found it advisable to give Florrie exactly what she wanted. She was an expert in making life intolerable for anyone who did not.

From the taxi emerges a little old man in a blue suit and bowler, who looks like a bank manager or perhaps a retired sea captain. Tomlin is gazing at him in dull surprise, wondering what he can want, when he hears a strange exclamation behind him and looks around. Florrie is up on her feet and is also looking out of the window. Her eyes are jumping out of her head, her cheeks are blue-white, her mouth has sagged open. Tomlin has never seen anyone so completely and utterly terrified. For a moment she does not move, probably cannot, only the slack mouth twists as if she were going to scream.

But she does not make a sound. She shifts her gaze to Tomlin, puts a shaky finger to her lips as if to implore, "Not a word," and just as the front doorbell rings, she tiptoes out of the room.

A moment later the char flings open the sitting-room door and flaps away back to the

kitchen. She is a scrubwoman by nature and resents answering bells.

The little old man walks in, hat in hand, and presents himself, "Mr. Smith."

In address and manner he is more like a captain than a banker. His glance seems to say, not "What sort of an account are you?" but "What sort of a man have we here?"

"I don't think I—" Tomlin stammers. Florrie's mysterious panic, her last imploring gesture, have thrown him in confusion. Here is some kind of crisis and he isn't used to sudden crises.

"No, you don't know me," says Mr. Smith, "and I don't know you, but I'm not selling anything and I shan't keep you a moment. I believe you know a friend of mine called Blew, one of my oldest friends. I hear his daughter Florrie has been staying with you quite recently."

"Yes."

"Is she here now?"

"I'm sorry but she's—"

"Do you know her present address?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid—"

"Well then, Blew's address. He's the man I want."

"I'm sorry but I think—"

"No idea where he is?" Mr. Smith keeps his little blue eyes fixed all the time on Tomlin's

face with an unwinking stare which would have been rude in a detective examining a suspected murderer.

This look is as disconcerting to Tomlin as that of a maniac whose whole way of thought is alien. But Mr. Smith has an even more alarming habit. His mouth, which is absurdly small, a mere pucker under his rather thick nose, is in perpetual motion. After each of Tomlin's remarks he will chew for several moments as if tasting the flavor, and after each of his own he will purse up his lips as if to whistle. He purses them up now and pushes them forward till they resemble the sucker on an octopus.

Once Tomlin has caught sight of his mouth he can't look anywhere else. Neither can he give any real attention to the man's questions. There is a kind of block in his mind.

He is not in the least afraid of this man. He is only confused before him as in the presence of something incomprehensible. Just as in face of his elder brother's delight in humiliating him he had felt more discomfort than resentment—a kind of sick bewilderment at such a phenomenon, and was ready to do anything to put an end to it—so now he does not know how to deal with a creature so mysterious

and evil to his feeling. He is anxious only to get him away or to get away from him.

"Well," he stammers at last, "I did have a letter."

"Where from?"

"I—I rather think it was Eire."

"Eire." Mr. Smith is suddenly interested. His eyebrows rise high into his bulging forehead, "What address?"

"He didn't give an address but the stamp was Eire."

"What postmark?"

Tomlin, gazing at the man's mouth, actually does not take account of this question till Mr. Smith, raising his voice, as if to a deaf person, barks, "Postmark?"

"Postmark—oh, I don't think I noticed the postmark."

"Got the envelope?"

"No."

Mr. Smith whistles silently and takes a last hard look at Tomlin. His expression is not so much contemptuous as inquiring. He seems to be asking himself, "What is this thing, this object?"

Then he dismisses him with a chew. He is once more animated.

"Eire—so that's the idea, is it. I hadn't thought of that one." He adds to Tomlin, "Thanks a lot, Mister—" and makes off to his taxi. Tomlin falls into a chair.

He gives a deep sigh and reflects, At least, I didn't put him on poor Florrie's track.

The char appears in great indignation which she aims at Tomlin. "What have you done with the baby?"

"What baby?"

"Why, *the* baby," bawls the char, who has a certain feeling for Florrie's baby because Florrie gives her gin and complains to her of Tomlin. "It was in the garden, but the pram's empty."

And in fact, not only the baby but Florrie herself has disappeared. The only news of them to be had is from the milkman who has seen Florrie, hatless and coatless, with the baby, running down the back lane. "I asked her if anything was wrong, but she didn't stop," the milkman says.

That is two years ago, and Tomlin has heard no more of Florrie.

And as of an evening, alone in his shining house, beautifully kept by one of those excellent housekeepers always available to house-proud bachelors of quiet habits, Tomlin toasts his muffins and unfolds his *Times*, he feels a gratitude beyond expression. At last he admits it to himself, No doubt about it; I'm a sheep, a born sheep. And what luck that is, what marvelous luck.

Robert L. Fish

The Adventure of the Perforated Ulster

In which the incredible Schlock Homes succeeds and fails simultaneously in his own inimitable fashion . . .

Detective: SCHLOCK HOMES

A hiatus in cases of any serious consequence during the early months of the year '66 allowed my friend Mr. Schlock Homes an opportunity for some well-needed rest, as well as a chance to indulge in a few of his many hobbies. I recall in particular how diligently he practiced his prestidigitation in preparation for the annual Magician's Meet; but I am saddened to relate that when it finally was held, poor Homes was found wading.

The same period, however, permitted me to bring some order to my voluminous notes, and it is well that I did so, for two cases which I had planned on ultimately relating turned out to be nothing of the sort. Homes had been writing a treatise on the mating-dance of the *ondatra bibethicus*, and I had somehow mistakenly incorporated his notes in my casebook as *The Adventure of the Muskrat Ritual*. An even greater embarrassment was narrowly avoided when I discovered a long series of correspondence covering an unpaid bill of Homes's to a doctor at a local hospital, which I had erroneously filed as *The Adventure of the Patient Resident*.

Time, however, permitted the correction of these errors, and it was with a feeling of growing ennui that I came into the breakfast room of our quarters at 221-B Bagel Street one bright morning in April to find Homes already ensconced at the table, his creamed kipper already finished, and lighting his first after-meal Bulgarian. He smiled brightly as I entered, and I noticed a telegraph form fluttering from his thin fingers.

"Ah, Watney!" said he, his eyes sparkling. "It appears our inactivity is about to end. My brother Criscroft has telegraphed

that he intends to drop by this morning, and as you are well aware, such visits in the past have invariably led to the most interesting of problems. I trust this occasion will prove no exception."

"But he offers no clew?" I inquired, sitting down and drawing my napkin under my chin.

"He says—but never mind. Here, unless I am greatly mistaken, is Criscroft himself."

He turned towards the door and a moment later our page had ushered in Homes's illustrious brother. With a brusque refusal of a kipper Criscroft flung himself into a chair and stared at us broodingly.

"Schlock," he said at last, his voice heavy with worry, "I know that in the past I have often brought you problems affecting the well being of our country; but believe me when I say that never before has one of our basic institutions been faced with so dire a threat!"

Homes leaned forward, his voice deeply sympathetic. "As you well know," he said sincerely; "I am always at your service. Pray, how may I be of assistance?"

Criscroft shook his head in misery. "I greatly fear," he said in a tone heavy with dread, "that we have a case of pilfering at our club."

Homes's eyebrows lifted slightly. "But, certainly," he said with a frown, "a simple case of pilfering should not upset you to this degree. Any club might have an unfortunate member who temporarily finds his needs greater than his means."

Criscroft's face had fallen—if possible—even lower during this discourse. "You do not understand," he said, his voice almost breaking. "It is far more serious than that. Our club has *not* been pilfered. The pilfering, I fear, was done for the *benefit* of our club!"

Homes's frown deepened. He tented his fingers and stared across the ridge-pole of his knuckles into his brother's tortured eyes.

"You mean—?"

"Exactly! Were it to be bruited about that our financial status was so precarious that such assistance was necessary to maintain us, the mere rumor might easily shatter the confidence of the public in this staunchest of all our national institutions!"

"And you think—?"

"Indubitably! Were people to begin doubting the solidity of our British clubs, there is no predicting to what dark ends these suspicions might lead!"

"And you suspect—?"

"Definitely! It is obvious that the perpetrator of this foul deed is not doing it out of idle whim, nor would he take so drastic a step out of mere personal spite."

"And you conclude—?"

"Precisely! He is therefore acting under the orders of some group dedicated to the destruction of our system. Undoubtedly a foreign group, since no Englishman, however treasonous, would be so subversive as to attack the institution of the British Club!" A look of peace replaced the agonized expression on his face. "You cannot know how good it is, Schlock, to benefit from your analysis. And I am convinced you are right!"

"Thank you," Homes replied modestly, and leaned forward again. "Pray favor us with the details."

"Of course," Criscroft agreed. "Well, as you may or may not know, I have recently assumed the chairmanship of our club's House Committee, and in this capacity I have the responsibility for the operation of the bar and kitchen. I have therefore taken, of late, to inspecting the culinary premises at odd hours, in order to see how the steward is handling his duties."

He paused a moment to collect his thoughts, and then continued: "Well, about a week ago, on one of my periodic tours of the kitchen, I chanced to note a new coffee percolator. I said nothing at the time, but I later made it my business to go back over the Committee minutes, and I found no recommendation for the purchase of this percolator, nor, in fact, any appropriation by the Finance Committee for its acquisition."

"And you considered this odd?"

"Extremely odd, particularly since few of our members are addicted to the bean, considering it quite rightly a colonial affectation. However, I continued to maintain my own counsel, awaiting further developments. And then, just the other evening, in checking the bar equipment for our annual Walpurgis Night Dinner—Lord Walpurgis being one of our oldest members—I was amazed to discover a new cocktail shaker."

"A cocktail shaker?" Homes's eyebrows shot up.

Criscroft smiled grimly. "You also note the foreign touch, eh? As we all know, a cocktail shaker tends to bruise whisky, and no

true Englishman would think of employing one."

"Certainly not!" Homes exclaimed indignantly. His voice became probing. "And I assume that again there had been neither recommendation nor appropriation for its purchase?"

"Neither. I knew then, of course, that the matter was far more serious than a simple error in judgment, and I felt it vital to seek your aid."

"And well that you did so! What is the name of this steward?"

"Sean O'Callahan."

A thoughtful frown crossed the lean face of my friend. "Not an English name," he said slowly.

"Now that you mention it, it does sound foreign," Criscroft replied, and then looked troubled. "It is my hope that Sean is only an innocent dupe in the scheme. He is the fifteenth generation of O'Callahans to serve in that position at our club, and I should hate to think of him as a traitor."

"Still," Homes continued, his eyes glittering, "I assume you investigated him?"

"To the limited extent of our ability. I have had four men from the Foreign Office on his trail for the past twenty-four hours, have had his telephone tapped, and have even had secret microphones concealed in his attic bedroom at the club. Unfortunately, the A.I.C. men who installed them apparently did the job backwards, so I fear they have been less than effective. He can hear us, but we cannot hear him. However, since the building is an old one, and fairly well inhabited by mice, I doubt if he ascribes too much importance to the additional sounds of our conversation."

Homes came to his feet, striding up and down the room, his hands clasped tightly behind him. "So to date you have been unable to earth anything? I mean, you have been able to unearth nothing?"

"Only this," said Criscroft, reaching into a pocket and producing a small, thin pamphlet. "In the manner of the Purloined Letter it was cleverly concealed by simply leaving it on the top of his dresser, which I must admit is quite suspicious in itself. However, I doubt if you will find it of much use. Our code experts claim it is beyond their ability to solve."

He handed the small brochure to Homes, who instantly dropped back into his chair to peruse it. I came to stand behind my friend while he examined the publication, and I reproduce its cover below for the benefit of such readers who are still with us.

ULSTER PREMIUMS*Topnotch - Honest - Easy*

* * * * *

REDEMPTION EXCHANGE

Battersea Eleven

London, South

+ + + + + + + + +

Homes studied the cover for several moments, and then slowly rifled the pages; the small booklet opened almost by itself to a page which illustrated a variety of cocktail-shakers. He then turned several more pages, noting the detailed and colourful drawings and photographs of the items therein, and then shut the pamphlet with a dark frown upon his face.

"Schlock!" Criscroft cried, noting his brother's expression. "What is it?"

Homes turned a worried face in his direction.

"You can see the extreme care that has gone into the preparation of this booklet," Homes said heavily. "Certainly they would not have gone to this trouble just to embarrass your one club. I suggest the plot is far more sinister, and that in all probability they have infiltrated many more, if not, actually, all the clubs of London!"

Criscroft paled. "No!"

"I fear so. However, the game is early on, and there still may be time to scotch their nefarious plot." He shook his head and stared at the pamphlet once again. "There can be little doubt that this plan is costing them a pretty penny. It would undoubtedly, therefore, help to know the source of their finances."

"Raffle tickets?" I suggested helpfully.

He shook his head a trifle impatiently. "No, no, Watney! A

plan this costly would not depend upon anything as uncertain as the proceeds of a raffle. Besides, what would they use as a prize? They are already using all standard items as part of their scheme."

Homes came to his feet. "No, the answer must lie, at least in part, with this steward Sean O'Callahan. If you will permit me to change to more suitable raiment, I should like to study this situation at first hand."

For a moment Criscroft looked a trifle upset. "You are not a member, of course," he began, and then shrugged. "If worst comes to worst, I shall just have to tell them you are my brother."

The Anathema Club, of which Criscroft had the honor to be a member, was an ancient and sturdy edifice located on the edge of Interdit Park, and as I entered the hallowed precincts I felt, as always, a touch of pride in just being British, as well as a wave of fury at the miscreants who dared to jeopardize all that the club stood for with their foul scheme.

Criscroft led the way to the pantry and then excused himself, leaving Homes and me to our own devices. With the briefest of glances about the tiled kitchen, Homes made his way to the small attic room which served the steward as a bed-chamber. O'Callahan, it appeared, was out shopping, but two A.I.C. men were there, pretending to dust the furniture, and Homes nodded to them distantly before beginning his search.

From my position near the doorway I watched as he bent to peer beneath the bed, examined the closet and its contents carefully, studied the dresser drawers in great detail, and then walked over to pick up an open envelope which lay on the top of a small desk in the corner. One of the A.I.C. men interrupted his task, moving closer.

"It's only the morning post," said he with a faint sneer. "We've already gone through it. There is nothing of importance there, Mr. Homes."

Homes acknowledged the statement with a cool nod, but still proceeded to raise the flap of the envelope and withdraw the note contained therein. A small rectangle of greenish-coloured paper fluttered to the desk as he unfolded the brief note and perused it. His eyes widened as he scanned the lines, and then went instantly to the small bit that had fallen free. It was obvious that only the greatest of effort prevented him from exclaiming aloud.

"Homes!" I cried. "What is it?"

With a warning glance in the direction of the two A.I.C. men he shook his head meaningfully at me, and then quite casually slipped both the note and the small bit of greenish paper into his pocket.

"I don't believe there is anything more for us here, Watney," he said, winking at me. "I suggest we return to Bagel Street and take up our investigation in more comfortable surroundings." And he winked at me again.

"Homes!" I exclaimed. "You have something in your eye! Permit me—"

"Later," he said savagely, and strode through the doorway.

It was only as our hansom was rattling across the cobblestones of Upper Regent Street that he allowed himself to relax. "There is nothing of importance there, Mr. Homes!" he said with biting mimicry. "The fools! An obvious clew under their noses, and all they can think to say is: 'There is nothing of importance there, Mr. Homes'!"

"But, Homes," I said, staring at him anxiously, "what was there of importance?"

"Only this!" he replied, and thrust the note in my direction. I took it and perused it rapidly; its message was quite succinct. *Sir* (it read): *When last you visited my establishment, you forgot the enclosed.* And it was signed, *The Butcher*. I looked up queryingly.

"But, Homes," I said, "I see nothing of importance here."

"Then you are ready to join the Metropolitan Police and the A.I.C.," he replied acidly. His hand came out to retrieve the note. "The Butcher! That can only be Professor Marty, the most dangerous criminal in all England, and a man who earned the appellation of The Butcher for all too obvious reasons! And you may be sure, Watney, that where Professor Marty is involved, we are dealing with a foe worthy of our mettle!"

"And that little bit of greenish paper that was enclosed?"

"That?" Homes smiled grimly. "Only the answer, I am sure, to the major problem of this entire case—that of their finances!"

"But I do not understand any of this, Homes!" I exclaimed.

"Later," he said, and leaned forward. "Here we are in Bagel Street, and we have much to do if this problem is to be resolved in time."

He thrust a coin at our cabbie and hustled me to the pavement even before our hansom had stopped. I followed him up the stairway to our rooms to find him already dragging two reference volumes from their shelf; he carried them to the table and turned

up the lamp. His next move was to carefully remove the small bit of coloured paper from his pocket and place it gently upon the desk top, after which he bent down and began to pore over the opened books, each one page by page. I came to stand beside him, staring down at the small rectangle, and then reached out to pick it up.

"Why, Homes," I exclaimed in disappointment, "It is only a postage stamp. Perforated, I see, and from Ulster Premiums—"

"Only a postage stamp, Watney?" He looked at me askance, and then closed the two reference books with a slap. "Do you realize how rare this stamp is? Not only do Stanley Gibbons and Scott fail to list it, but they fail to list any issue marked Premium for any country at all! And pray note the superb mint condition, with the original gum intact, which adds immeasurably to its value! Why, this stamp must be worth a fortune! Five or six of them, released at judicious times on the philatelic market, could furnish the funds these miscreants require for their infernal plot."

"But, Homes," I protested, "who could possibly be behind this scheme? Certainly the Professor would not do it out of sheer malice; he must be employed by some group. Who could they possibly be?"

"Ah," said Homes, clasping his hands behind his back and beginning to stride the room. "That is the question! That and, of course, the best way to foil them." He paused a moment, frowning. "As to the people behind this dastardly plot, I am sure the answer lies in that pamphlet, if only I am clever enough to solve it." A grim smile crossed his lips. "As to the best means of stopping these culprits, I believe I already see a rift in that loot." His eyes came up. "Would you do me a favour, Watney?"

"Gladly, Homes," I replied warmly.

"Then I should like you to visit my brother at his club and arrange for me to secure a list of all club stewards in the city of London. And haste, I might mention, is of the essence."

"You may count on me, Homes," I began, but he had already fallen back into his chair and was reaching for the small brochure. It was obvious that he had already forgotten my presence. Pausing only long enough to have lunch, I set about my errand.

It was upon my return, as I was mounting the stairs, that I heard a sharp sound that sent me dashing up the remaining steps to burst through the door. It was only Homes smiting himself on the forehead.

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"Of course," he muttered bitterly. "I am a fool! The answer was staring me in the face all along!"

"Homes!" I exclaimed, hurrying forward. "What is it?"

"Look," said he, and pointed a quivering finger at the sheet of paper he had been covering with his calculations. "Note this: if you take the letters in the name 'Professor Marty' and if you eliminate all duplication of letters, you will find you have, respectively, the following: P, R, O, F, E, S, M, A, T, and Y. Placing them in alphabetical order, they then come out: A, E, F, M, O, P, R, S, T, and Y."

He stared at me calculatingly, his eyes bright with excitement. "Now, Watney, if we assign a numerical value to these letters, with A as 1 and Z as 26, then note how they come out!" His fingers hastily marked the numbers down; he looked up triumphantly. "Watney, they come out 1, 5, 6, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 25!"

"Indubitably, Homes," I agreed doubtfully, and stared at him.

He smiled at my puzzled expression. "Let us now apply these numbers to the pages of this pamphlet," he said gently, "and see what items they refer to." His thin fingers began to turn the pages. "Ah, here we are! Page 1 deals with Upright Pianos; page 5 with Tapestries. Page 6 lists various Hassocks; page 13, Eggbeaters; and page 15, Rotisseries. Page 16 illustrates Ermines; page 18, Bicycles; page 19, Emeralds; page 20 with a variety of Lamps, while page 25 fittingly closes our solution by showing Shovels!"

"Really, Homes, you should eat at more regular intervals—"

He waved this aside. "*The initials of these items, Watney!* They speil UP THE REBELS!" He tossed his quill aside and came to his feet. "I knew that name Sean O'Callahan had a foreign ring! I shall be greatly surprised if, upon investigation, we do not find it to be of Irish origin! I should have realized from the word Ulster that such a possibility existed!"

He nodded his head in conviction. "Think, Watney! To-morrow is the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Sunday uprising, and what better revenge could they ask than to attack Britain at its most vital spot?—the sanctity of the British Club!"

I clasped his hand. "Homes, you have done it again! Only you could have solved the mystery of the brochure in the manner in which you did!" My face fell. "But, even knowing this, how are we to stop this vile and despicable scheme?"

"Ah, Watney," he replied, "that is already attended to. You have a list of the stewards?"

"I do," I said with complete honesty, and handed it over.

"Then to work!" said he, and drew from his desk drawer huge sheets of identical stamps. "I shall stuff these into envelopes, and then you shall address them to the list of stewards."

He noted my baffled expression and laughed, albeit ruefully. "A pity, Watney, but there was no other way! While you were visiting Criscroft I have not been idle. A friend of mine who is a printer hastily arranged for the printing of these perfect facsimiles."

"But, Homes!" I objected. "If one stamp is so valuable, will not this great number allow them even vaster funds for their foul designs?"

"Ah, Watney," he replied, shaking his head sadly. "It is easily seen that you know nothing of philately. Where one stamp is a great rarity, and worth a fortune, tens of thousands of that same stamp render the entire issue worthless. No, Watney, you may be assured that when these thousands of stamps enter into circulation, the entire scheme will fail!" He patted me on the head and then turned to his desk. "And now to work!"

It was several mornings later that I entered the breakfast room of our quarters, picked up the newspaper, and was just beginning to go through the columns in search of some crime report which might serve as a springboard for Homes's analytical ability, when my friend came into the room and seated himself opposite me.

"Ah, Watney," said he, spearing a curry, "do you find anything of interest for two idle investigators in your perusal of the news?"

"Very little, Homes," I replied, scanning the leaders. "I do note a case of bankruptcy at some Coupon Trading Company—whatever they are—but such crimes are probably best left to the solicitors."

"I agree," he said, reaching for the cream.

"Although," I added, reading further, "I do note that the president of the company blames his misfortune on something he calls forgery."

"Forgery?" Homes sat erect. "A dire crime, Watney! And one which no true Englishman will warrant! A note to the authorities offering my services, if you please!"

Postscript:

Criscroft Homes was kind enough to help me prepare this

particular adventure for publication, and in the course of proof-reading the cover of the infamous brochure for Ulster Premiums he suddenly paused with a frown.

"I note, Watney," said he, looking up at me, "that further along in this tale you make the statement that only Schlock could have solved this case in the *manner* in which he did."

"That's true," I admitted. "Why?"

He pointed to the booklet cover. "Because," he said, smiling at me proudly, "you were quite correct!"

I am always pleased to be the recipient of a compliment, especially one coming from Criscroft, although in this case I have no idea of why he so flattered me.

Dr. W.

ULSTER PREMIUMS

Topnotch - Honest - Easy

* * * * *

REDEMPTION EXCHANGE

Battersea Eleven

London, South

+ + + + + + + + +

EDITORS' NOTE: We had no more of an eagle-eye than good old Schlock. The acrostic on the brochure cover—the message spelled out by the initials of all the words—slipped past our imperceptive eyes as blithely as they slipped past Schlock's . . . Ah, Watney, we salute your obtuseness; pray move over and hand us the dunce cap . . .



John and Ward Hawkins

Frame-Up on the Highway

One of the best novelets we've ever read on the theme of sudden death on our highways—one of the best because it's real, because it has heart, and because it will hold your interest in an unbreakable grip . . .

Jimmy Franklin didn't know how the accident happened. He was driving carefully. A seventeen-year-old with two minor accidents charged to him had to drive carefully. Too, he had just passed the scene of a crash on Lake Boulevard—police cars, an ambulance, a curious, swirling crowd—and the memory of that held his speed down and sharpened his awareness.

The night was clear, the gentle curves of Dutch Hill Road were dry, there was little traffic. He came up on a new and expensive car going about twenty-five. "Mrs. Murphy," he said. He knew the car, knew the driver. She was married to Pop's best customer.

He followed her for a time, wondering why she was just poking along. Then he pulled out and passed her, alert for any danger that might come around an approaching curve.

He swung back in good time toward the right-hand lane.

Her headlights were on the high beam. They hit his rear-view mirror and blinded him for a moment, but not long enough to cause him any trouble. There was no car approaching, no reason to hurry. He had done everything right, everything safely, and yet he was no more than across the center stripe when something struck his car a giant blow.

He yelled a hoarse, wordless sound of fear. His car went out of control, tires squalling across dry pavement; the steering wheel twisting in his hands. Jimmy could not think in his panic; he could only fight instinctively and desperately, and he fought with considerable skill.

The careening car almost overturned; somehow he managed to hold it upright. Then it began to fishtail, the rear end

whipping back and forth, the front end seeking the ditch on either side of the road like a thing possessed.

He was aware that headlights had flashed crazily across the trees on the right of the road, and now he heard a second crash behind him. He was sickened, as if he'd been struck again, but he was fighting too hard to give it thought.

The fishtailing stopped at last. With the car rolling straight, he used the brake—not hard, pumping it carefully—and brought the car to a stop two hundred feet down the road from the point of collision. Shaking, weak with shock, he could not move for a moment. Then awareness came back to him suddenly.

"Mrs. Murphy," he said hoarsely.

He hammered the door of his car open, lunged through it, stumbling, to the road. The road back of him was dark and empty. He yelled the name of the woman again and ran that way—seventeen, a lanky, gangling boy in desperate haste.

The woman's car had left the road on the right side, plunged down a small incline and into a grove of trees. It had struck two trees hard. The chrome-laden front end was crushed, the long and shining hood stood open to the sky. The headlights were

out, smashed, but the dash lights glowed. Looking down from the shoulder of the road, Jimmy saw that a man had reached the car before him.

"Is she hurt?" Jimmy called fearfully.

The man was leaning into the car. He straightened and looked at Jimmy. "Yeah, she's hurt." He turned to the car again.

Jimmy went down the bank in clumsy, great strides. There was enough light from the interior of the car, and from the stars and the newly risen half moon, to see the man who had preceded him. He was wearing overalls, a vest, a short-sleeved shirt—a stringy wisp of a man, near fifty. He was trying to pull the inert body of the woman from the car. Jimmy caught his shoulder.

"Don't move her!" He'd had first aid in high school; he knew that much. "You can hurt her bad!"

"She's hurt bad now! She—" Jimmy pushed past the man and leaned into the car. What he saw filled him with nausea and turned his bones to rubber.

Mrs. Murphy had been a very pretty woman, twenty-five or six, long blonde hair, dark blue eyes. She'd been an actress or something, and there'd been talk about her after she'd married Mr. Murphy. Jimmy

hadn't listened much to the things people said, and they sure didn't matter now.

Her face had hit the steering wheel. She was half lying on the seat, unconscious, breathing heavily. There was quite a lot of blood on the seat, in her hair, on her face, and she was still bleeding.

Jimmy fumbled helplessly, mind numb with shock, almost blank. Then, suddenly, he found his senses. He backed out of the car and turned on the thin wisp of a man.

"Call a doctor!" he said. "Get an ambulance!"

"Why me? I—"

"Because I can't leave!" Jimmy yelled at him. "There's plenty of houses on the other side of the road! Get up there and get to a phone! Tell 'em Dutch Hill Road near Forty-Seventh. And for gosh sakes, hurry!"

The man stared at Jimmy, open-mouthed, then wheeled and scrambled up the bank. He reached the road and began to run. Jimmy turned back to the injured woman. He tried desperately to control his panic, to think clearly.

Arterial bleeding—look for that first. There was none. Jimmy tore off his warm-up jacket and covered her. He ripped his white shirt apart, made pads, and applied them

gently to the woman's face.

Cars passed on the road above, driven by people too preoccupied to read the story the skid marks had to tell. But others stopped. Jimmy was aware of men's voices, excited, questioning. He answered briefly, if at all. He resisted one hand that tried to pull him away from the little he was able to do for the woman.

Presently, sirens moaned to a stop on the road above, doors slammed, and uniformed men came down the slope. A hand touched Jimmy's bare shoulder.

"We'll take over, son," a quiet voice said. "Stand aside."

The police and the ambulance crew took care of Mrs. Murphy, giving her emergency treatment. They lifted her gently to a stretcher and took her away, bandaged, blanket-wrapped and still unconscious.

Jimmy watched it, sitting in the police car, as he'd been told to do. He tried to ignore the curious who peered in at him; he tried not to hear their voices.

"Damn kid! Wouldn't you know?"

"A hot-rodder!"

"Look at that car of his. Flames painted on the fenders! You see a wreck, you see one of those practically every time! They oughta rule 'em off the road!"

Jimmy held his head in his

hands. A hot rod—that was a laugh! Roy Wyatt had painted those fenders when he'd owned the car, trying to make it look sharp.

A hot rod! A beat-up, worn-out oil hog was more like it. Fifty miles an hour, down a steep hill with a tail wind, was the best you could get. Buying the car, paying for insurance, feeding it oil—he couldn't afford to repaint the fenders.

But if you were seventeen and had a car you were a hot-rodder—a dirty word.

The police cleared the road. There were two of them, sober and frowning. They came back to the car where Jimmy waited. One of them had Jimmy's warm-up jacket in his hand.

"You better put this on."

Jimmy got out of the car, so shaken he could barely stand. "How is she?" he asked. "Will she be all right?"

The officer with the jacket, Sam Riggio, was a lean-hipped, heavy-shouldered man with a fighter's dark tough face. Mark Bradford, his partner, was tall and wore glasses. Neither man was a stranger to blood and broken bodies; both knew the damage youngsters can do.

Bradford resented teen-age drivers, sometimes to the point of hate, but Bradford had no children of his own. Sam Riggio had a son, fifteen.

Riggio decided that whatever else this skinny, man-tall boy was, he was not a hot-rodder. Where was the long hair, the tight jeans, the boots? This kid was crewcut; he wore cords. He had a homely-good-looking face, with brown eyes that looked at Sam Riggio, pleading.

"She'll make it," Riggio said gruffly.

Grimly, Bradford said, "How about her face?"

"Hold your lip," Sam Riggio said.

The two officers left Jimmy in the car while they took measurements and made sketches. Then they came back to get Jimmy's statement.

"We're short the name of the guy in overalls," Riggio said. "That's a must—get the name of anybody who might be a witness."

"How could I?" Jimmy asked. "He never came back!"

"Who needs witnesses?" Bradford asked. "The facts speak for themselves. The kid cut back too fast, jammed her wheel."

Riggio scratched his cheek. "At least he didn't make it a hit-and-run, like the guy on Lake Boulevard a little while ago. That one left a woman in tough shape. It's ten to one against her."

"I didn't cut back too fast," Jimmy said.

Bradford made a soft sound of ridicule.

Riggio got out of the car suddenly. "Come on, son," he said. When Jimmy was beside him, he shut the door and spoke through the window to his partner. "I'll ride home with the boy in his jalopy. You follow us. And wait outside, will you?"

Bradford nodded.

The right rear door of Jimmy's car was smashed, the glass broken, the right rear fender was crumpled against the wheel. Officer Riggio pulled the metal away from the tire and checked the running gear.

"Looks all right," he said. "Let's go."

He got into the front seat on the right side. Jimmy had to get behind the wheel. His hands were shaking, his legs were weak. He didn't want to drive.

"I—I don't know if I can," he said.

Riggio got a cigarette from his blouse pocket and took his time lighting it. "This isn't the end," he said. "You've got a lot of years to go, a lot of cars to drive. The time to try again is now. I think you can do it."

Jimmy's eyes watered and his throat hurt—kindness always did that to him. Then he set his jaws. The man said drive, so he'd drive! He got the car going and felt his confidence return.

"I didn't know there were cops like you."

"Only a million of them," Riggio said.

Jimmy kept his eyes on the road. "A couple of things I didn't tell you," he said. "I went past that accident on Lake Boulevard after it happened. It scared me—y'know, a guy thinks how easy it could happen to him. That's one reason I was being careful. The other reason, I recognized Mrs. Murphy's car before I pulled out to pass it. Her husband is a contractor. My father sells heavy equipment. He sells a lot to Mr. Murphy."

Riggio sighed. "How tough can it get?"

"That's one car I wouldn't want to scratch," Jimmy said. "I gave her plenty of room. You can see why I would."

Riggio shook his head. It was a gentle lie—there was no question in his mind as to the cause of the accident.

"Your father buy this car for you?"

"No," Jimmy said. "Pop told me I could have a car when I could pay for it and the insurance and the gas and oil. I saved my money since I was fourteen. I work at Keefer's Supermarket after school. That's where I was tonight. I just came from there."

Where, Riggio wondered

tiredly, was the reward for virtue he'd always been hearing about? The hit-and-run driver who had left the elderly woman broken and bleeding on Lake Boulevard would probably never pay for that piece of dirty work. The chance of finding him was slim. But this lad—he'd stayed at the scene, done all he could, seen the blood, and felt the pain—this lad and his family would pay dearly.

Jimmy turned into the driveway of the house where he lived—a comfortable home, white siding, white brick, green shutters, trimmed hedges and green lawn. Suddenly it didn't matter who was to blame. He had to tell his mother and father he'd had another accident, had to watch what hearing it would do to them. This was a prospect that brought him sickness almost beyond bearing. Officer Riggio knew what was in his mind. "I'll be with you, son," he said.

They went up the walk together. Jimmy opened the front door. There were voices in the living room. The TV was going. Pop was in there, resting after a day at the plant and three hours in the garden. Pop grew the best flowers of anybody in the neighborhood.

"Jimmy," his mother said as they walked into the hall, "you're late."

She came into the hall. She saw Officer Riggio and stopped. She was small and slim; she had brown hair and brown eyes. Her name was Ann, but Pop called her Cricket, because she was never still.

She took care of her house and her people at a dead run. Pop had a joke about that. "If she thinks she's going to get double time," he'd say, "she's got a busted sprocket." Pop didn't like his Cricket very much, he was pure crazy about her.

"Jimmy," Cricket whispered, "where's your shirt?"

"I had an accident," Jimmy said.

Cricket closed her eyes. Her mouth got the pinched look it had when she was scared or hurt.

Pop came out of the living room then. He was a big man, heavily muscled, deeply tanned. He had thick, dark hair, dark brows, gray eyes. A laborer at fourteen, a construction superintendent at twenty-five. At forty, he was close to being a partner in Western Machinery, selling heavy equipment to highway contractors. Jimmy had always thought he'd be satisfied if he turned out to be half the man Pop was.

"This is Officer Riggio," Jimmy said.

"Come in," Pop said.

He led them into the living room, switched the TV off. Officer Riggio sat on the sofa. Cricket would not let Jimmy beyond the reach of her hands. She made him sit in a chair, then sat on the arm of it beside him.

"Was anyone hurt?" Pop asked.

"A woman," Riggio said. "The driver of the other car."

Jimmy tried to swallow the lump in his throat—tried and failed. "It was Mrs. Murphy, Pop."

Twenty years of construction work had given Roger Franklin a tough face. His thick brows came down in a scowl. The scowl didn't scare Jimmy, though it made him feel immeasurably worse. Pop looked like that only when he'd been hit hard.

"Hurt bad?" Pop asked.

Riggio glanced briefly at Jimmy, then gave the boy's father a look of warning. "Too early to say," he said. "Facial cuts—cheeks, lips, forehead. Concussion, but I don't think a skull fracture. An ambulance took her to Mercy Hospital."

"I'll be right back," Pop said quietly.

He used the telephone in the hall, listening more than he talked. His face had lost color when he returned.

"Still in emergency surgery,"

he said. He looked at Jimmy. "Maybe you'd better fill us in."

Jimmy told them what had happened, trying to straighten it out in his head. He did it badly, because each part of the memory frightened and sickened him again—the crash, fighting to keep his car under control, the second crash, the woman's ruined car, her bleeding face. He was shaking and sweating when he finished.

"I see," Pop said. He looked at Cricket. "Clean him up, will you? Get him a shirt, try to get some food in him—not that he'll eat. Some milk, maybe."

Cricket touched Jimmy's arm. "Come on, son."

"Pop," Jimmy said, "you'll call the hospital again?"

"In a little while," Pop said.

He waited until Cricket and Jimmy were beyond hearing behind the swinging door, then turned to Officer Riggio, his tough face softened with concern.

"Is it as bad as it sounds?"

Officer Riggio took a deep breath. "I like to call on parents after accidents, y'know? When the youngster's committed a crime—speeding, squirreling, drinking, reckless driving—I warn the parents so they can take a hand. A lot of kids need a whipping." His eyes came up to meet Pop's. "Your son's not like that. He's a good boy."

"I know that well," Pop said. "But both his mother and I thank you for saying it."

"The hospital told you about the woman's face? That it could be disfigured?" Riggio waited for Pop's nod, then went on, "I didn't think it was time to hit the boy with that. He'll have to know, but why not a little at a time?"

"Thanks again," Pop said.

"The accident—" Riggio said. He got his notebook from his pocket. "Weather clear, road dry. The woman was driving at a moderate speed. The boy passed her, going about forty-five. No visibility problem, no oncoming traffic. The cars collided in the right-hand lane—the tire marks, glass, mud on the pavement show that, beyond doubt. The woman was taken to the hospital unconscious. I couldn't get a statement from her. The boy honestly believes he did everything according to the book, safely. The facts say something else."

Pop said, "He cut back too fast."

"He's seventeen," Riggio said. "He's got a right to drive. But how long does it take to learn? And who pays for the mistakes kids make while they're learning?"

"A tough question," Pop said. "I don't want to answer it

now—not for the record."

"I know—they don't give kids much insurance."

"And I'm not a rich man," Pop said.

He walked to the front door with Officer Riggio, thanked him again, and let him out. Then he called the hospital. Mrs. Murphy was off the critical list, sleeping under sedation. No, there had been no skull fracture. Yes, her face had been damaged. Broken nose, broken cheekbone, severe lacerations.

Pop put the telephone down, a very sober man. He went into the kitchen to face two very worried people.

"Off the critical list," he said, "but her face took a real beating."

"I knew it!" Jimmy said. "I saw her." He slammed a fist into a cupped palm. "She was so pretty."

Cricket whispered, "The poor woman."

"One of us has to call Charlie Stern," Pop said. "The insurance company is going to get hit hard on this one. They'd better know."

"It's my insurance," Jimmy said. "I'll call him."

Pop and Cricket waited in the kitchen. They listened to the one-sided conversation, anguish in their faces. They expected him to be heartbroken and utterly defeated when he

came back, but his round face was tight and there was anger in his eyes.

"He didn't believe me either!" he said.

"Believe what?" Pop said.

"That I didn't cut back too fast. I told him how the accident happened. He didn't say it right out—he said, 'Don't admit the blame to anybody'—but he might as well have said it."

"Jimmy—"

"I had two other accidents," Jimmy said. "An old lady with thick glasses and a dog jumping around in her car; a fat guy who smelled like a brewery. His fender—the one that got nicked—had dents so old they had rust in them. I'm a teen-ager, so I'm wrong all the way. He gets a new fender and I get the blame. The old lady—"

"The facts say this one's your fault."

"The cops' facts." Jimmy was pacing the kitchen. "While you were in there talking to Riggio, telling each other what lousy drivers kids are, I was out here, thinking about my facts. I'd like to have somebody listen while I tell 'em."

Pop's voice was firm. "Whoa, Jimmy."

Jimmy paused in mid-stride, dropped his hands. "I was yelling. I'm sorry," he said. "But I was driving with extra

care because I'd passed where there'd been a hit-and-run accident—cops all over, ambulance, crowds."

Pop said, "On Lake Boulevard. We heard about it on TV."

"Yeah," Jimmy said. "Accidents scare me, so I was driving carefully. And I recognized Mrs. Murphy's car. Mr. Murphy's one of your best customers. I'd run in the ditch before I scratched that car. Wouldn't I?"

"If you had a choice," Pop said.

"I tell you I gave her plenty of room."

"The collision was in the right-hand lane."

"Does that mean it was my fault?"

Pop said, "I'm afraid it does."

"What if she ran into me?" Jimmy said. "What if she hit the gas? With all the horsepower she's got in that car, she'd be up my back before I knew it."

Pop stared at the boy. "Jimmy, for the love of Mike!"

"It could happen," Jimmy said.

"How fantastic can you get?"

Cricket said, "Please, Pop. He's upset. Let's don't talk about it now."

Jimmy looked at her. "You don't believe me either."

"I didn't say that, son. I—"

"You don't have to say it."

He looked at his father. "Or you, Pop. You both think I'm trying to alibi, trying to chicken out of my responsibility. You both think I'm a liar."

"I do not!" Cricket said.

"Honestly mistaken," Pop said. "I don't doubt for a moment you believe you were driving safely. You may have been thinking too much about the accident you'd seen and not enough about your driving. You may have misjudged speed and distance. Face it, Jimmy; no one would overtake a passing car deliberately. You can't sell it to me or anyone. Don't try to sell it to yourself."

Jimmy's face was tight.
"That's the last word?"

"That's it." Pop stood up.
"I've got to go and talk to Ben Murphy and tell him how I feel about his wife being hurt." He looked at his son. "You don't have to go."

Cricket said, "Not tonight!
Jimmy's—"

"I'm all right," Jimmy said.
"I'll go."

Pop and Jimmy reached Ben Murphy's gate at ten o'clock. The yard lights were on, a dozen or more scattered over an acre of tableland bulldozed out of the hillside. A brick wall paralleled the road.

"High enough to discourage

outsiders," Pop had once said, "low enough to let them see what they're missing."

The house, ablaze with lights, was long and low, white brick and glass and red roof tile. Pop parked the family station wagon beside a bullet-nosed sports car in the drive.

"Pop," Jimmy said, his face still tight, "no matter what you think or I think, I can't take the blame. Charlie Stern told me not to."

"We're not here to take the blame," Pop said. "We're here to show we're responsible people, that we're as sorry as people can be that Mrs. Murphy was hurt."

They got out of the car and followed a white walk around the house to the front door. Ben Murphy answered their ring. He was wearing a light topcoat and a hat and held a drink in one hand. He was a stocky bull of a man. His face was round and flushed, his mouth full-lipped. His eyes were hard flat chips of glass that caught and held the light.

"Franklin," he said, "what do you want?"

Pop said, "This is my son, Jimmy. He was—"

"Sure!" Murphy's voice was harsh. "James Franklin! That was the name they gave me, but I didn't tie it to you." He looked at Jimmy, sudden fury

clouding his face. "You lousy little punk! Do you know what you did to my wife? You damned near killed her, that's what you did. You tore her face all to hell!"

Jimmy said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Murphy. I—"

"Sorry! You should see her! I just came from the hospital, and I tell you it tore me apart. A beautiful face—in shambles. Nose smashed, eyes closed, deep cuts." He lifted his glass and swore. "You're sorry! You're gonna be worse than sorry!"

Pop eased his big bulk in front of Jimmy. "Slow down, Ben." His voice was soft, but it held an edge. "We came to tell you we couldn't feel worse about it and that we're standing by. Don't rough the lad; he's feeling bad enough."

"Let him talk," Jimmy said.

"What's that?" Murphy's voice was sharp. He tried to see past Pop. "You smart-talking me, kid?"

"No, sir, I'm not," Jimmy said. "I know how you feel about Mrs. Murphy. Take it out on me if you want to. I saw her right after the accident—I took care of her. And I wish I had somebody to take it out on."

Murphy stared at Jimmy a moment. Then, to Pop, he said, "Get this kid outta here!" His voice was hoarse, shaking. "I

don't trust myself. That murdering brat of yours—I'd like to use my hands on him. Run my wife off the road—" His mouth jerked. "You'll hear from me, Franklin. You'll hear from me!"

Pop turned and took Jimmy's arm. "Come on, lad."

Pop and Cricket sat in the kitchen, facing each other across the kitchen table, after Jimmy had gone to bed. They didn't joke as they usually did, hunting light words to make a serious moment less painful. Cricket's hands were locked together. Pop rubbed his face.

"Ben Murphy is not what you'd call a kind man," he said. "He's rough and I think he'll be ugly about this. A second wife, twenty-five years younger than he is, a beautiful woman—to a man like Ben, a woman like that is more than a wife. She's a prize possession—proof he's a success as a man and as a businessman."

Cricket said, "She's no better than she—"

"Hey, now!"

Cricket caught a lip in her teeth. She was silent a long moment, struggling with herself. Then her eyes came up to meet Pop's. "Can I take that back?"

"Sure, hon," Pop said gently. "I thought the same

thing; I had to take it back, too. No matter what she is, she's suffering now. Calling her names won't help anybody."

Cricket nodded miserably. "I know."

"Ben would sue his grandmother for a scratched fender," Pop said. "For a personal injury—he'll be downright savage."

"Jimmy has liability insurance."

"Ten thousand." Pop got up from the table to pace the kitchen slowly. "How much is a woman's face worth, Cricket? Any woman, and a beautiful woman in particular?"

Wearily Cricket said, "Whatever you can get."

"Right," Pop said. "And anything over the insurance will come out of us. Fifty thousand, a hundred thousand—what's the difference? We've done all right, but it wouldn't take a big judgment to clean us out. Jimmy's insurance company will fight the suit and we'll fight it. But we might as well take the truth by the nose—Jimmy was to blame. We haven't got a chance."

"Don't tell Jimmy—please!"

Pop went to her and put his hands on her shoulders. "He'll have to know," he said, "but later will be soon enough."

"I wish they hadn't invented automobiles."

"Or damage suits," Pop said. "I've worried about this every time I heard the boy start his car."

Jimmy was up early the next morning and gone early. He did his homework in the study hall before school started. That was part of the deal he'd made with Pop. He could work at the supermarket, earning money to pay for the car, but if his grades went down—blooie!—no job, and the car went into the garage and stayed there. And he was campused—no movies, no dates, until his report card was good again.

He had a little trouble concentrating—the accident, the memory of Mrs. Murphy's bleeding face kept getting in the way. But he got through the school hours somehow. And he went from school to the police station. The law said he had to file a report within twenty-four hours of the accident.

A uniformed man gave him a blank and pointed to a desk. Jimmy filled in the spaces of the blank. He drew a diagram—Car A, Car B—showing how the accident had happened, then took the form back to the man at the counter.

"Car A hit Car B." The policeman looked at Jimmy. "Car B is your car. Are you trying to say she ran into you?

after you passed her?"

Jimmy's face flushed. "Yes, sir."

"Good Lord!" the officer said. "Of all the flimsy alibis I ever heard, that takes the cake!" He threw the form in a box. "Now I've heard everything!"

Jimmy left the counter and the police station, his cheeks flaming. He got into his car and fumbled with the keys. Every time, every gosh-darned time! If you were seventeen, you were a slob, a lying slob! The cops, Charlie Stern, Pop, Cricket, Mr. Murphy—not one of them would even say "maybe."

"I'll show 'em," he said, "or just something!"

He stopped at the supermarket and talked to the manager. "You've got time off coming," the manager said. "Take as much as you need."

Jimmy went back to his car. He drove out Dutch Hill Road to Forty-seventh, parked there, and looked around. Houses on one side of the road, brush and trees on the other. Most of the houses close by were big and new, with fine lawns and lots of shrubs. But there were old places, weathered and shabby, on the side streets that wandered away toward the hill.

"One of those," Jimmy said.

He left the car. He climbed up and rain-warped steps and

rang an old-fashioned doorbell. He talked to a woman with gray hair and watery eyes.

"I'm looking for a man who saw an accident last night," he said. "He wears bib overalls and a vest and a shirt with chopped-off sleeves."

"Nobody here like that."

"Thanks anyway," Jimmy said.

He knocked on the other doors. He talked to an old man, to a girl who wouldn't smile because she had braces on her teeth, to a woman whose hair was redder than any fire engine he had ever seen.

He walked up one street and down another. Before he ran out of daylight, he had been to every old house within a quarter mile of the scene of the accident.

After dinner he spread a map of the city on the kitchen table and began to pencil out the streets he'd covered. Pop and Cricket came to look over his shoulder and ask what he was doing.

"Keeping track of where I've been," Jimmy said. "That way I don't have to go over the same ground twice."

"You're looking for the witness?" Pop said.

"Yes," Jimmy said. "He was on foot. I figure he lives within maybe a mile of where the accident happened."

"That could be." Pop's frown said he was thinking hard. "One thing you'd better face, son. When you find him, he may break your heart. He may not have seen it or he may say you're to blame."

"Then I'll know," Jimmy said.

The next afternoon Jimmy took up the search as soon as school was out. He knocked on fifty or sixty doors, asking the same questions every time. Most of those he talked to were interested; most of them tried to help. Two people were sure they knew the man he was hunting, but both were wrong. One of the men they sent Jimmy to see was confined to a wheel chair, the other had been in Alaska for more than a month.

He used up the afternoon. He was walking back to his car when the bullet-nosed sports job came down the street, Ben Murphy at the wheel. The stocky man parked at the curb, close by.

"Over here," he said. "I want to talk to you."

"Yes, sir," Jimmy said.

"I was rough with you the other night," Murphy said. He wasn't smiling, but there was no anger in his face. "My wife goes downtown to buy a hat; next thing she's in the hospital. I was worried sick about her. Natural-

ly. Since then, I've had time to think. I've known and liked your father for a long time, done a lot of business with him. I don't want him hurt or you hurt."

Jimmy said, "Well, thanks, Mr. Murphy."

"The bills have to be paid—the hospital, the doctors, the garage. Your insurance will take care of them." Murphy's eyes had no part in his brief smile. "This is between friends, boy. Let's keep it that way."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You're a worried guy," Murphy said. "You'd be less than human if you weren't. It could be unpleasant—complaints, litigation, your driver's license gone." He smiled again. "I see your car out here every time I go by. You're scrambling around trying to find something—somebody to get you off the hook. Right?"

"The witness," Jimmy said.

"A waste," Murphy said. "Forget it. Nothing's going to happen to you. Go home and rest your feet. The insurance company will pay the bills and everything will be fine." He put the car in gear. "And be careful, kid. The next guy might not be a friend of your father's."

Jimmy said, "Mr. Murphy, I—"

But the sports car was

moving, gravel spurting under the wheels. The tail-lights flared red, and it was gone around a corner. Jimmy stared after it.

"Fine!" he said. "As long as my insurance company has to pay, it's fine! And what does that do to me?"

Jimmy set his jaws. No matter what Mr. Murphy said, he wasn't quitting yet. The man in the bib overalls had to live somewhere. He'd been on foot. He—

"Wait a darned minute!" Jimmy said.

He went back to his car, a new idea in his mind. The house nearest the scene of the accident was new and very big. The woman who answered the door was young, a pretty woman. She listened gravely to Jimmy's description of the witness.

"No," she said. "He doesn't live here."

"What I thought, he might work for you," Jimmy said. "Mowing the lawn, trimming the shrubs. One of the odd-job men that come around. Sometimes they leave a card."

"Sorry," the woman said.

Jimmy tried the house next door, the one next door to that. He found a blond and chunky man who had seen the witness.

"Asked me to call an ambulance," he told Jimmy. "A stranger, though. I'd never seen

him before. I've never seen him since."

Jimmy found people who'd heard the crash, who'd gone to see what had happened, but none who remembered a thin gray man who wore overalls and a vest.

"Somebody must know the guy," Jimmy said.

He went on with it, until dusk thickened into dark. He went home to find Pop and Cricket talking quietly in the kitchen. They stopped talking when he walked in.

He didn't have to tell them he'd had no luck; they saw it in his face. Cricket was suddenly very busy at the range. Pop crumpled a beer can in his hands.

"Charlie Stern called," he said quietly.

Jimmy said, "I'm fresh out of insurance?"

"That's the size of it," Pop said. "Charlie'll try to get you in the assigned-risk pool, but that'll take time."

"And cost more," Jimmy said.

"I can drive you around evenings," Pop said.

"No," Jimmy said. "But you gave me an idea."

Two people could cover twice as much ground as one. Ten or twelve could hit every house within a mile in just one afternoon. A lot of kids he

knew had cars, and not all of them had jobs.

Jimmy made a list and got on the telephone. Beans Hall had an appointment with a dentist. Jack Davis had a tennis date.

"I'll skip that," he said. "Ringing doorbells might be fun."

"I'll buy your gas—two gallons," Jimmy said.

He had it organized before he went to bed. Nine cars and twenty kids showed up on Dutch Hill Road at Forty-seventh, the next afternoon. Jimmy spread his map on the hood of Jack Davis's car.

"Each car gets a street," Jimmy said. "Up one side and down the other. Every house—don't miss even one. Then come back and report and get a new assignment."

"What if we find the guy?" Jack Davis said.

Jimmy said, "You get two extra gallons of gas."

He stayed behind as the cars fanned out through the neighborhood. He found a stump beside the road and used it for a desk. Just keeping track of where the kids had been turned out to be a job.

Sometimes there were two or three cars lined up, waiting to report. And twenty searchers could have as little luck as one. The kids turned up several

people who had seen the man, but none who knew his name or where he lived.

"We'll keep goin'," Jimmy said.

He was talking to Fats Porter and Bob Hentley when he heard the blaring horn. Busy with the map and pencil, he did not look up. The horn yelled again and again. Fats Porter grunted his disgust, turned away, then turned back.

"Jim," he said, "I think the guy wants you."

Jimmy looked up. The bullet-nosed sports job was back again, parked on the shoulder of the road. Ben Murphy was peering over his shoulder. He hit the horn again, beckoned impatiently.

"I'll be right back," Jimmy said.

There was no smile on Ben Murphy's face. "You!" He thrust the word at Jimmy with a lifted chin. "I told you to go home and rest your feet!" he said. "Didn't you hear me, kid?"

"Yes," Jimmy said. "I heard you."

"So now you brought your gang!" Murphy's voice was harsh. His big hands gripped the wheel so tightly the cords of his wrists stood out like iron wire. "I was nice to you. Let it alone, let the insurance company pay the bills—that's all I asked. But

no! You want to mess it up, shove it into court, make it tough for me to collect!"

"It wasn't my fault," Jimmy said.

"I'm giving you one more chance!" Murphy said. "Keep on and you'll get it—in the neck! You and your old man. I'll take care of you first. My wife will sign a complaint, criminal negligence, reckless driving. You'll be looking at a judge before you know it. You'll lose your license, get slapped with a fine, maybe a jail sentence. And that's only the beginning! We'll sue your father for a hundred thousand dollars for what you did to my wife's face!"

Jimmy said, "You can't—"

"The hell I can't!" Murphy said. "You're a minor; he's responsible for what you do. I'll sue and I'll win and I'll clean him out—every last dime, house, car, everything. He'll be the rest of his life paying off the judgment, and that's a promise, kid!" His lips flattened. "Go home and stay there, or you and your father will be in more trouble than you ever dreamed about!"

"Yes, sir," Jimmy said.

He watched the sports car roar away and then went back to the stump. He picked up the map and folded it carefully. He looked at his friends, eyes dull.

"You can take off," he said.
"We're through."

He found Pop working in the garden, stripped to the waist. Pop wouldn't use a power cultivator. "These mitts of mine like the feel of an idiot-stick," he'd said. The truth was that Pop liked hard work.

One look at Jimmy's face was enough to bring him out of the garden.

"You found your witness," he said.

"No. And I guess I'm not going to. Mr. Murphy said he was going to sue you if I kept trying to cause him trouble." Jimmy swallowed. "Can he do that, Pop? I mean, for a lot of money. A hundred thousand—everything you've got?"

"I've been expecting him to," Pop said quietly.

Jimmy's voice broke. "Why didn't you tell me? I thought my insurance would be enough. I could have gone on looking and ruined you."

Pop's face was tight with thought, his eyes searching. "When did Murphy make this pitch about cleaning me out?"

"Just a while ago," Jimmy said. "The first time I saw him, he said he wasn't going to sign a complaint. All he wanted was for my insurance company to pay for everything. Great for him, but not for me so I kept

on looking. This time he got real mean. Said if I didn't quit trying to get out of paying he'd clean you out."

"He did, did he?" Pop took Jimmy to a set of lawn chairs and made him repeat every word of both conversations he'd had with Murphy. There was anger in Pop's face, mixed with deep concern. "Still think you were in the clear on the accident?"

"I know I was."

"But now you're willing to throw in the sponge?"

"For gosh sakes, Pop! If it was just me, I wouldn't care. But it's you and Mom now. I can't do anything that would make Mr. Murphy ruin you!"

Pop laid a big hand on Jimmy's arm. "That's a tough thing to say to your old man. You'd give up fighting for something you feel is right to protect me. Am I so helpless?"

"Pop, I didn't mean—"

The big hand tightened on Jimmy's arm. "Don't ever quit," Pop said slowly, "don't ever quit anything you think is right as long as you've got a breath left in your body. Every man's got a light that guides him. Turn it off for me, for anybody, and you'll get lost in the dark."

"You want me to go on?"

Pop nodded. "Come hell or high water. And if you want

more help, I'll give a hand."

Jimmy got up from the chair, excitement growing in him. "I could use some help, Pop. There are places me and the kids couldn't look because we're minors. I thought a man like him might spend a lot of time in taverns and bars. They won't let me in alone, but if you were with me they might."

"What do you mean, might?" Pop stood up, six feet tall, one hundred and ninety pounds of hard bone and muscle. He swelled his chest for Jimmy. "Who's going to argue?"

Jimmy grinned, delighted. "Nobody!"

"So, okay," Pop said. "Get the car out."

Jimmy watched him cross the yard toward the house, so proud he could hardly stand it. "What a guy to have for a Pop!" he said. "A one-man army!"

He ran for the garage and backed the station wagon into the drive. Pop came out of the house presently, wearing slacks and a sports shirt, and got behind the wheel.

"You're the skipper," he said. "Where to?"

"He was walking," Jimmy said. "He could have been on his way to a place or on his way from one. We could start where I had the accident and hunt in

one direction. If we don't have any luck, we can come back and hunt the other way."

"Will do!" Pop put the car on the road.

They began their search at a crossroads a half mile from the scene of the accident. There were two stores here—a service station and a tavern. The men in the tavern swung around to stare at Jimmy, and the bartender came down the bar to wave him away. Then Pop came through the door.

"Hold fast," Pop said. "This is my son."

The bartender looked at the spread of Pop's shoulders, at the size of his arms, at the thick brows that were in a scowl.

"Yes, sir," he said. "What can we do for you?"

Pop said, "Take it, Jimmy."

"I'm looking for a man who saw an accident," Jimmy said.

He got to look in the face of every man there, and no one protested. They listened to his description, they tried very hard to place the man, and all of them were genuinely sorry when they could not be of help.

"I'll ask around," the bartender said. "Come back in a day or two if you don't have any luck."

"Thank you all," Jimmy said.

The next place was another

tavern, and the scene was repeated. It was followed by four more taverns, three cheap bars, and a package store.

They didn't find their man, but it was not because of resistance. The round-faced, man-tall boy and the quiet, big-shouldered man were a team no one cared to deny.

When they had covered every place within a reasonable walking distance in one direction, Pop turned the car and they began to hunt in the other.

"Still with me?" Pop asked.

"We'll find him," Jimmy said. "We can't miss."

They found him in a dingy, hole-in-the-wall joint. He was drinking wine with a beer chaser in a booth toward the back. Jimmy almost missed him because he was wearing a suit instead of overalls and a vest. A thin wisp of a man, older than his fifty years, unshaven. He had a weak mouth and blurred eyes.

"Do you remember me?" Jimmy asked.

"Maybe I do," the man said. "And maybe I don't."

Pop came up behind Jimmy. He put a big hand on the table. "Make up your mind," he said quietly.

The blurred eyes looked at the hand for a long moment. "Yeah," the man said then. "I remember you, kid."

Jimmy's knees almost folded under him. After all the hours of searching—finally! He tried to swallow and found his throat too dry.

"Did you see the accident happen?"

"I was there, wasn't I? Yeah, I saw it."

"Whose fault was it?" Jimmy asked. "Mine or hers?"

The man rubbed his stubbled chin. He took a drink of wine and a swallow of beer. Then he grinned at Jimmy.

"Yours, kid," he said. "You cut in on her and ran her off the road."

The color drained from Jimmy's face, the strength drained from his legs. Pop put a hand on his shoulder and turned him. Jimmy started a protest, but the hurt and deep sympathy in his father's face told him the case was closed.

He pulled free of his father's hand and went out and got into the car. In a few moments Pop came out and got in beside him.

"Tough," Pop said gently. "I'm sorry, lad."

Jimmy didn't answer.

Pop fumbled with the car keys. "It was a chance we both knew you were taking. So you lost. But I'm still damned proud of you. You gave it a good fight."

Jimmy turned a quivering face toward his father. "I

wasn't taking a chance," he said. "I knew if I found the guy, if he'd seen the accident, he'd clear me. Why? Because I know I didn't cut back too fast!"

"He saw the accident. He said—"

"Pop! He lied!"

Pop stared at Jimmy. Then, suddenly, he swore. "What in hell is the matter with me?" he asked. "I can believe a booze-brain or I can believe my son. Who do I believe? The booze-brain. I ought to have my rump kicked!" He slapped the door of the station wagon open. "Be right back!" he said.

He was gone five minutes—an eternity for Jimmy. And when he came back, he was grinning. "You're the champ," he said.

Jimmy's face began to light. "Pop, did he really—"

"He sure did," Pop said. "I offered him twenty-five bucks to see the accident our way. He said no. I said fifty bucks and he said no. I said a hundred, and he said yes."

"No, Pop!" Jimmy's voice was agonized.

Pop grinned. "Easy does it, boy. All I wanted was to find out if he was for sale. He was. So I put my fist under his nose and asked if maybe he hadn't sold out to Murphy first. Turns out he had. For fifty bucks."

"Murphy paid him?"

"This is a wino," Pop said.

"His brains are pulp. He'd sell his soul for the price of a few bottles, and he can't think farther ahead than a few. He saw Mrs. Murphy run into you after you'd passed her—the accident was her fault. You're a kid, driving a heap. You couldn't pay him anything to testify. But a man who owned the car Mrs. Murphy was driving could afford to pay him not to testify. He got Murphy's name and address from the newspaper account of the accident, went around to Murphy, and made his pitch—pay up or he'd look you up. Murphy paid."

"But that makes Mr. Murphy a crook!"

"So it does," Pop agreed.

"Why—why would he do it?"

"It's a chance to clip your insurance company for your public liability—ten thousand bucks—and for a bandit like Murphy that's important. Sure, he's got insurance of his own. One-hundred-dollar deductible and maybe seventy-fifty medical—about a tenth of what's going to be needed. And without that witness, he's got grounds for a lawsuit against you and your insurance company—his wife's beautiful face has been smashed. What's the value on that? Fifty thousand?

All this he gets for just fifty bucks."

"No wonder he was afraid I'd find the witness."

"Yeah," Pop said. "No wonder." He put the car in gear.

"Wait a minute, Pop," Jimmy said. He was staring through the windshield. "Now we've got to think about something else—something that's been driving me nuts. She ran into me. We can prove that now. But how? And why? Stop and think about it. The only way—she'd have to do it deliberately."

"Her foot could slip off the brake—"

"And jam the gas down? And hold it down that long?"

"For the love of Mike!" Pop said. "She wasn't mad at you. She couldn't gain anything by running into you. She could get herself in a bad smash-up, and she did! Jimmy, lad, it just doesn't make sense!"

"Maybe it does." Jimmy turned his head slowly to look at his father. "Remember the tangle I had with the guy who smelled like a brewery? He had a beat-up fender; he got a brand-new fender out of the accident. Maybe Mrs. Murphy wanted to hit me just a little, to cover up a bent fender or something. But she hit me a lot and went out of control."

"The Murphys can afford to fix their own fenders."

"You've got to run into something to bend a fender," Jimmy said. "Can they afford to fix what Mrs. Murphy hit before she ran into me?" He looked at his father. "I may be wrong, but I've got to talk to the cops. Right now. Will you take me downtown?"

"When you tell me what's in your head," Pop said.

They walked into the police station together, faces grave with concern. There was doubt in their minds, but their responsibility was clear to them, and responsibility can sometimes be an enormous burden. Jimmy talked to the Lieutenant in charge of traffic.

"I went by that hit-and-run accident on Lake Boulevard, just after it happened," he said. "It scared me pretty bad. I've been thinking about it a lot, watching the papers. But I've never seen where you found the driver."

"We haven't found him." The Lieutenant was a thin, sharp-nosed, dour man. "But I'd give my right arm to find him. The old woman he left in the gutter will live, but she'll never walk again."

Jimmy swallowed. "Could the driver have been a woman?"

The Lieutenant, looking at

Jimmy's pale face, wondered if the boy was going to be sick.

"It could have been a woman," he said slowly. "All we've got is a description of the car—a big, late-model sedan."

Jimmy turned his stricken eyes to Pop, asking for help, for guidance. But what help could there be? And what guidance, except to point the way straight forward? Pop put a big hand on Jimmy's shoulder.

"I don't know for sure," Jimmy said. "I'm not accusing anybody, see? But I've got to tell you what happened. After I passed the accident on Lake Boulevard, I went out Dutch Hill Road—that's the way I go home. There was a woman driving real slow out there. I passed her. And after I passed her, she speeded up and ran into me."

The Lieutenant tipped his head. "She ran into you? After you passed her?"

"We've got a witness," Pop said.

"All right. Go on, son."

"The woman, Mrs. Murphy, had been downtown buying a hat—her husband told me that. She'd go home by way of Lake Boulevard. Everybody does who lives out our way. It's quickest by fifteen minutes. So she had to go past the place where the woman was hit. If she'd stopped to think what she

could do or drove real slow, I'd have caught up with her where I did." Jimmy's eyes were miserable. "Why would anybody run into a guy on purpose?"

"You tell me."

"To cover up something like a bent fender?"

"Or a cracked headlight," the Lieutenant said softly, "or a dented hood. Because every car that's gone into any garage with that kind of damage has been reported to us and we've checked it out. Mrs. Murphy's car was checked out, but the damage was blamed on you. You'd better tell me the name of your witness, son."

Patrolman Sam Riggio came to the Franklin home early the next evening. There was no need for him to do it. But he, too, was a man with a sense of responsibility. He made his partner, Mark Bradford, go to the door with him.

Bradford was the man who resented teen-age drivers, sometimes to the point of hate. Riggio was smiling when Pop opened the door.

"We'd like to talk to Jimmy."

Pop led them into the living room. Jimmy was playing cribbage with Cricket. He stumbled to his feet, his face twisted in a worried frown.

Cricket said, "Oh, my goodness!" and flew around the room, picking up papers and straightening cushions.

"We've come with an apology," Riggio told Jimmy. "We didn't call you a liar, but we refused to believe you, and that adds up to the same thing."

Bradford stepped forward. "You've got a right to chew us out," he said, "but I've got to tell you there's not much left to chew. The Lieutenant got to us first. We jumped to a wrong conclusion, we let a hit-and-run driver get away. The Lieutenant takes a dim view of that kind of work. We're lucky to be alive."

Jimmy said, "Did—did Mrs. Murphy do it?"

Riggio nodded. "Once we'd talked to your witness, it was easy going. We went from him to Murphy to ask Murphy why he'd paid the fifty dollars, and from there to Mrs. Murphy to ask why she'd run into you on purpose, since it had to be that way. She's not a tough criminal with a thought-out plan. She's a frightened woman with an enormous burden of guilt. She wanted to be rid of it. She gave us a confession."

Pop was frowning. "Did Murphy know about the hit-and-run when he paid the wino the fifty bucks?"

"No," Riggio said. "And neither did the wino. When the

wino showed up at Murphy's front door with an offer to get lost and keep his mouth shut for fifty dollars, Murphy grabbed it like a shot. It was small money, money he could throw away or deny he'd ever spent. And it cleared his wife of the blame of hitting Jimmy."

"It also paved the way to a damage suit," Pop said, "against Jimmy, his insurance company, and me. A damage suit that could go fifty or a hundred thousand. A real bargain for fifty bucks."

"Not such a bargain," Riggio smiled. "When he'd thought about it a while, Murphy saw that his wife must have run into Jimmy on purpose. He asked her why, she told him, and then he had a can of beans he was afraid to open. What could he do about the wino? He couldn't go to him with more money and a ticket out of the state. The wino would want to know why—all he'd asked for, all he'd wanted, was fifty bucks. And if the wino found out why, he could blackmail Murphy for the rest of his life."

"But leave it alone," Pop said, "and it was a million to one the wino would never put the two accidents together. The police didn't and their brains aren't pulp."

"That was his choice," Riggio agreed. "A Hobson's

choice, and Murphy made the wrong pick. He calls it bad luck. I call it the kind of thing that happens to a man with larceny in his heart."

Cricket said, "He should have gone to the police and admitted his wife was the hit-and-run driver."

"And face criminal action and a lawsuit that could bankrupt him?" Pop asked. "Not Murphy!"

When the police had gone, Pop put his arm around Jimmy's shoulders and grinned proudly at Cricket. Cricket knew her son well, knew why there was no light in the boy's eyes.

"Mrs. Murphy will be all right, Jimmy," she said. "I've talked to her doctor. It isn't so bad as they first thought. There may not even be noticeable scars. She'll be pretty again."

Jimmy turned to her, doubting. "Mom, honest?"

"I promise."

"That's—that's wonderful." He caught his mother's face suddenly between his hands and kissed her. "You're the most!" he said and went quickly away.

Pop stared after him. "After what she did to the old lady, after what she tried to do to him, he's worried about her face! How do you like a dope like that?"

Softly Cricket said, "Only very, very much."

Christianna Brand

The Skipping Game

One might almost say that Christianna Brand specializes in the "unusual." Sometimes her stories are traditional in form and technique—but they are never without ingenuity and freshness either in manner or material, or in both; but sometimes her stories are not at all traditional—witness this decidedly offbeat tale about blackmail, as nasty and shocking and dirty a business as the glossy pictures behind it all...

Linda Hartley was skipping rope with the Bindell twins, singing to a well-known tune a verse of their own improvisation; it was a game at which Joy and Roy Bindell were, through long practice, past masters.

"One, two, three, and four," chirped Joy,

"Father locks the office door.

"Five, six, seven, eight,

"He pretends he's working late."

She tripped over the rope and Roy leaped in.

"Nine, ten, eleven, twelve,

"He's not working by himself!"

All three stopped skipping and burst into giggles. Joy took the rope and skipped by herself, changing the theme.

"Pig, dog, cat, and cow

"Mother knows and what a row!

"Horse, goat, rat, and boar—
"I was listening at the door."

Linda was not so accomplished as the twins but she took the rope and had a go at it:

"Sun, moon, day, and night
"My parents also had a fight."

But she gave up and resorted to prose. "My mother said my father has got to make your father make your mother get me into Hallfield."

Hallfield was the posh girls' school of Linda's aspirations; Joy was going there for the summer term. Mrs. Bindell was on the Board of Governors, and since she disapproved of Linda and looked down on the girl's mother, she was only too likely to oppose Linda's admission.

"Stove, grate, fire, and hob," sang Linda, skipping again, "Your mother is an awful snob."

"Awful," agreed the twins, not singing. It must be ghastly for poor Linda, her father having married so far beneath him.

That Harold Hartley had married beneath him was acknowledged by one and all, not excluding Mrs. Hartley and himself. That he'd had much the better of the bargain occurred to none of them. Not that he was unkind to Louisa—not particularly; but he had always been a difficult, disagreeable man and of late had grown quite impossibly irritable—so ill-tempered and nervous and suspicious; neurotic, Louisa supposed would be the word for it.

He had even dug out an old war-time, smuggled-home revolver and kept it loaded in a drawer beside his bed. A nasty, black, ugly thing—she wouldn't so much as touch it herself—but it seemed to give him confidence. At times she wondered if he were the victim of some kind of blackmail—there was some oddly secretive visiting, now and then. Well, if that were so, she could only pray that it would continue—there seemed enough money to spare, and it was worth paying anything to

prevent any smear of scandal from interrupting the triumphant progress through life of her Linda.

Linda was their "only"—a horrid child, really, but to the loving and simple heart of her mother the very pink of perfection in brains and in beauty. For Linda alone did she resent the social rebuffs of snobbish little Sanstone—led by Mrs. Bindell, the solicitor's wife.

Why Mrs. Bindell should be so positively inimical toward her, she never could quite understand; that she resented the bosom friendship of the twins with Linda was evident. To effect a separation, Louisa strongly suspected, Mrs. Bindell would certainly oppose Linda's admission to the new school. However, Harold must cope with that; Harold saw a good deal of Mr. Bindell over those property deals of his, and he would fix it . . .

But alas, in gray December, Harold, in Louisa's own phrase, took ill and was about to die.

She sat with Mrs. Bindell in "the lounge" while Mr. Bindell went up to the sickroom. "Though it's not much use him going, Mrs. Bindell. It's days since poor Harold could speak a word, let alone be understood; nor hold a pencil to write, or even make signs."

"It is usual to call and inquire," said Mrs. Bindell, loftily, putting common little Mrs. Hartley in her place.

But Louisa, it seemed, had been right after all. Harold had been unable to say a single word to Mr. Bindell. "But he does seem to be trying to ask me something, Mrs. Hartley—something he wants me to find for him or something like that. Do you know what it could be?"

"No, I don't," said Louisa. "We know about his will and all that. Something to do with the office, perhaps?"

"I'll go along there," suggested Mr. Bindell, "and get them to let me look around."

But according to the office underlings nothing was found that could account for Mr. Hartley's anxieties; and when Louisa herself tried to question him, he rolled his head on the pillow and his look said as plainly as it had many times before during their life together, "Mind your own business, Louisa, and leave me alone."

And the days passed away and so at last did Harold; and at the Sanstone Crematorium ashes to ashes returned, and that was the end of *him*.

Mr. Bindell waited a decent interval—a fortnight, he evidently considered sufficient—and

then called on the widow, this time without his lady. Linda had gone to the movies with the twins. "So may I take it, Mrs. Hartley, that we are alone in the house?"

"Well, yes," said Louisa, startled. Was Mr. Bindell going to leap on her with improper proposals now that Harold was out of the way? She had always thought he had a nasty look.

But Mr. Bindell did not leap. Instead he reached into his brief case and brought out a large envelope. "You remember that your husband was trying to tell me something before he died? Trying to ask me to find something for him?"

"Yes, I remember," said Louisa. "Did you find it? What was it?"

Mr. Bindell selected from the envelope a single item—a photograph on glossy paper. He allowed Louisa one brief glance at it and then returned it to its envelope. "A collection of pornography," he said, and added, "The most lurid I've ever seen."

Louisa thought, from her one glimpse, that this was probably so. "Harold had this filth?"

"In the private drawer of his safe at the office. Of course when I saw what it was I concealed it from his staff." He snapped a rubber band round

the envelope. "No wonder he didn't want it found."

"No wonder," agreed Louisa, and thought of the gossip spreading out in widening circles of ever more unsavory scandal—nasty, dirty, salacious scandal, touched with that odd malice that, in so many quarters, Harold had seemed to attract. "Well, thank goodness, Mr. Bindell, it was you who found it. And thank you very much for bringing it to me."

Privately she thought he might just as well have thrown the whole lot in the fire and not disturbed her in her widowhood; but he wanted thanks and appreciation, no doubt.

Mr. Bindell, however, wanted more than that and made very little bones about it. "Money is tight these days, Mrs. Hartley. My wife likes to keep up a good establishment; and we have two children yet to educate. I know Hartley left you pretty well off, and you've only the one girl."

She sat with her hands in her lap, very still. She had been right, then, about there being a blackmailer. Only—Mr. Bindell! Mr. Bindell, the upright, respectable solicitor; and Mrs. Bindell, giving herself such airs!

She said at last, "How can you prove positively they were his? They might be anyone's—you might even have got them

yourself for this very purpose."

No fool, after all, Mrs. Hartley! Mr. Bindell reflected that these simple people had often very direct and rational minds. But he had been ready for it. "You saw what a glossy print it was? He would no doubt pore over the stuff—gloating over it, you know. The whole lot will be covered with his fingerprints."

"I see," said Louisa. "So—?"

"One word from me in my position—one whisper going the rounds at a Rotary luncheon, one anecdote confided in a pub when we've all had a drop too much . . . Not nice for a young daughter, Mrs. Hartley, growing up in a small town like this."

"No," said Louisa, very white. She wasted no more words. "How much?"

"There are sixteen of them. Say one thousand pounds each. And you buy them outright—no hangovers. But one by one," said Mr. Bindell. "One by one. I can't have you selling out sixteen thousand pounds' worth of stock and being unable to account, frankly and openly, for the sale. And who knows?—in time values in the pornographic market may rise."

She did not haggle; she acquiesced at once. He might have been alerted by that, but he was not; he knew her simple soul and that in it there was

room for nothing but her precious Linda. And over the next year or two she could find the money easily enough; it wasn't worth her putting up a fight.

"Next Monday evening, then, at my office? Half-past six, by the side door—I'll leave it ajar—after the staff has gone home. I often stay on and work late."

"I'll come if it's raining," she said. "If it isn't, I'll come the first rainy evening after that."

"Raining?"

"I'd better not be seen, Mr. Bindell, making regular visits to your office after hours. And there's no disguise like an umbrella, is there?"

Shrewd, very shrewd, and quick off the mark with it, too. "But unnecessary," he said. "It's all offices round there—never a soul about in the evenings."

"There'll be even fewer about," she said, "if it's wet outside."

And on Monday it was wet; and she took him £1000 and four weeks later another £1000—hurrying through the deserted streets, head down against the driving rain, wearing a long belted mackintosh, and with her umbrella up.

They wasted no time. He would leave the door open and be waiting at his desk, a few

papers scattered there relating to Harold Hartley's affairs, just in case they should be disturbed. And she would slip in and go up to his room on the first floor and hand over the small envelope with the banknotes in it and wait, unaffronted, while he counted them. And he would hold out the large envelope containing the pictures and allow her to select one—she did it steadily, not averting her eyes, though her cheeks would first go pale and then flush deeply—and tuck the selected picture into the big handbag she was careful to take with her; and then, with hardly a word spoken, she would leave.

And meanwhile at home she swept and cleaned and polished as though—as though, now that Harold was gone, she would sweep and clean and polish away every touch, almost every memory, of his past presence there. The only thing she did not polish, did not even touch, was the ugly black revolver in the bedside drawer.

But on the third occasion of paying the blackmail she took the revolver out of the drawer, wrapping it in a silk scarf, and put it in her large handbag. And this time she took no money with her.

She had thought it all over very carefully, reducing it to its simplest elements. Now she

carried no open umbrella but clutched about her head and face a plastic "pixie-hood"; and she had pulled up the long mackintosh by its belt so that the skirt came hardly down to her knees, and scuttled along with a wibble-wobbling gait on her highest high heels.

In the hall of the office building she took off the mackintosh, slipped over her head a large plastic bag in which she had cut a hole for her face and another for her rubber-gloved right hand. So attired and holding the revolver, she walked without flurry up the stairs to Mr. Bindell's room.

He went white when he saw the gun, whiter still when he took in the significance of the plastic covering. He stammered, "For God's sake! Don't shoot! Take them, take the whole lot—I'll never tell a soul, I swear it!"

"Not even an anecdote in a pub," she said, quoting, "when you've all had a drop too much?"

And she pointed the gun at the left side of his chest and, giving herself no time to think, pulled the trigger. It was stiffer than she'd expected and for a moment the whole thing seemed strong and alive in her hand; and there was more noise than she'd expected—Harold had told her that the gun was

fitted with a silencer and she'd rather relied on that.

But at any rate, it did its work. At that range it could hardly fail—and Mr. Bindell, who had been unpleasant enough in life, was now even more unpleasant in death.

She put the revolver on the desk, stripped off the rubber glove and the splattered plastic. A gun, its origins untraceable—fingerprints on it of a man unknown, who could never now be known, for his fingers, prints and all, were to ashes returned and in her well-polished home no trace of him remained. But a *man's* fingerprints, that was the point—not a woman's. And a common, household, rubber glove, worn over a regular glove—first, to obviate fingerprints inside the rubber, and second, to allow for a size that a man might have worn. And a plastic bag, never touched by her own fingers . . . And nothing in the world—for Mr. Bindell himself had been the careful one, the secretive one—to connect her with him: not, at any rate, from the lethal point of view.

She had brought with her a large envelope, addressed to herself at home, and already stamped. Into this she put the envelope containing the photographs. In the hall she put on her mackintosh again, belted it

up very short, and on her high-heeled shoes, wibble-wobbled out of the side door and into the rain.

She had marked a convenient mailbox between her home and the office. She now returned to it and there posted the envelope; in a dark corner behind the box she let down the mackintosh to its full length, took off the plastic hood, dried it carefully and rolled it away in its little plastic case. The handbag had been chosen, long in advance, to accommodate a folding umbrella.

In her own image again, without furtiveness and certainly without the wibble-wobble, she went back to Mr. Bindell's office, tried the front door, put on a puzzled air, went round to the side at last—went in, shaking out the wet umbrella, called up the stairs, mounted to Mr. Bindell's door, shrieked like any startled woman on seeing a bloodstained figure sprawled across a desk, ran to him, made such futile attempts as anyone might make to do something, anything... pushed aside the horrid black gun, picked up the plastic with fastidious fingers and quickly dropped it again; at last picked up the telephone...

“Well, I may just have touched things—if there are any fingerprints on them, then I

must have, but I was so shocked I hardly knew what I was doing. And blood, yes, there may well be blood on me, on my clothes—but I did try to lift his head, I did handle the blood-spattered telephone.”)

Meanwhile, however, she contented herself with dialing the police. “Do please come quickly! It’s dreadful! Yes, Mr. Bindell—you know, the solicitor. Yes, I came to see him on business—the papers are right here on his desk; he said to drop in any time, he’d be working late . . .”

The investigation took simply ages. It was not for several months that widowed Mrs. Hartley felt the time ripe to call on widowed Mrs. Bindell. “I thought I should have a word with you about Linda’s acceptance to Hallfield School.”

“That matter comes up before the Board on Tuesday,” said Mrs. Bindell—by this time well back in harness.

“Then Linda will start when Joy does next term,” said Louisa; and it was a flat statement.

“If we decide to admit her,” said Mrs. Bindell.

“I think you’ll decide to admit her all right,” said Louisa. She produced a large envelope and slid out a couple of glossy black-and-white

prints. "Disgusting, aren't they?"

"Where on earth—?" cried Mrs. Bindell, absolutely shocked.

"That night I found your husband dead . . ." said Louisa. "I told the police I hardly touched anything in his office, Mrs. Bindell, but that wasn't quite true. He had evidently been taken by surprise when the murderer came; this—this filth—was spread out over the blotter in front of him."

Mrs. Bindell opened her mouth as though to speak but shut it again.

"I happened to have a large handbag and I gathered the awful things up and brought them away with me. I thought," said Louisa limpidly, "that you wouldn't care for them to be found in your husband's office by anyone else. No one wants a scandal, and you with all the work you do in this town—Board of Governors at Hallfield, for example—you'd be particularly susceptible, wouldn't you?"

Mrs. Bindell tried again to speak, and again remained silent.

"You're going to suggest, perhaps," said Louisa, "that I can't prove the pictures were actually his. But these people—well, they pore over this kind of stuff, gloating over it, so I've

been told; so this glossy paper will be covered with his fingerprints."

Mrs. Bindell seemed to think about it, sitting in a saggy heap, all the bounce and arrogance gone from her. She said at last, arriving with surprising quickness on the whole at the proper conclusion, "How much shall I have to pay?"

Louisa had handed over £2000 to Mr. Bindell. Say another £1000 for pain and stress, not to mention what might, she supposed, be called "danger money."

"I'll take three thousand down," she said. "That's to settle—well, a kind of debt. And then of course there's the matter of Linda getting in at Hallfield. After that—" She shrugged. "I'm not hard up, Mrs. Bindell; financially I shall be quite safe—now. So it won't be a matter of cash. Just as long as my Linda gets along happily and successfully in Sanstone—you have so much influence here. Of course, the right school will help and then she and Joy might take some courses together, modeling or whatever it is they'll have set their hearts on by then; and then knowing the right people helps too and going to all the parties . . ."

She returned the envelope to her bag. "The secret will be safe with me," Louisa said. "I don't

go to Rotary luncheons or get drunk in pubs." And she fastened the bag with a snap and got up to leave. "Monday afternoon perhaps? You could drop the money in at my house—when you call to invite me to run a stall at Lady Graves's bazaar. I've never been asked even to help there; and though to be honest I don't think I've missed much, still, everybody else goes and I'd like to meet Lady Graves. I believe her children are charming, and the boy is about three years older than my Linda. . . One never knows, does one?" She thought it over for a moment, puzzled. "Now, what exactly would the boy's title be?"

"The Honorable," said Mrs. Bindell, dull-voiced.

"It will be a great help," said Louisa, "having you to help me over little things like that."

Linda and Joy were skipping again. Roy joined them, breathless, and seized the rope. He addressed his song to Linda.

"Cod, skate, sturgeon, shark—

"Your mother's on the blackmail lark!"

"Whale, walrus, and sea cow—

"She's got the feelthy peectures now!"

"No!" said Linda.

"Yes," said Roy. He went on.

"Sea, lake, river, pool—

"So you're going to Hallfield School."

"No!" cried Linda and Joy, together this time, excitedly.

"Yes, you are, and what's more," said Roy, skipping again—

"Men and horses, hare and hounds—

"You're going to have three thousand pounds,

"And go around with Joy and me

"And marry aristocracy."

He stopped skipping and they all rolled with laughter, hugging one another triumphantly.

"Well, honestly, can you believe it?" said Linda, when at last they stopped, exhausted. "Grownups!"

"What a flap if any of us so much as cheats a bit at school!"

"I suppose this means that it really was my mother who shot your father?"

"Of course it was," said Roy. "She knew these floozies had been going to his office after hours—all Sanstone knew it. The police thought some boy friend or father or someone had been watching and went in and did for him. Of course *they* knew nothing about the blackmail."

He exchanged a suddenly exultant glance with his sister. It might someday be profitable

to be the only ones in the world who knew that Mrs. Hartley was a murderer.

Linda saw nothing of the glance. "It's jolly decent of you to take it like this."

"Oh, well, we didn't like him very much, did we, Roy?"

"We don't like any grownups very much," said Roy.

"And I must say," Linda remarked, "considering that he was blackmailing her with the feelthy peectures after my father died, he jolly well deserved everything he got."

"M'm. On the other hand,"

said Roy, "*your* father had been blackmailing *our* father with them for years. So it was really only tit for tat."

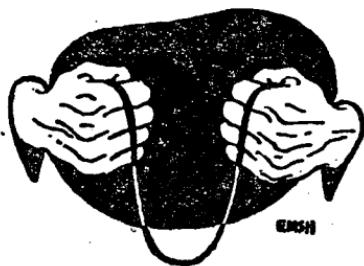
And Roy caught up one end of the rope and Joy caught up the other end and Linda flew into the middle; and as they turned and skipped, all three gaily sang:

"Tit for tat and knick for knack—

"The biter bit the biter back.

"Hound hunts fox and fox hunts hound—

"Oh, what a merry merry-go-round!"



Ellery Queen

Object Lesson

About the shortage of schoolrooms—and how Ellery learned that overcrowded classes can contribute to juvenile delinquency. Seven dollars—that's all that was involved; but it was one of the most important cases in Ellery's career . . .

Detective: ELLERY QUEEN

Ellery hurried down West 92nd Street toward the main entrance of Henry Hudson High School stealing guilty glances at his watch. Miss Carpenter had been crisply specific about place, date, and time: her home room, 109; Friday morning, April 22nd; first period ("Bell at 8:40, Mr. Queen"). Miss Carpenter, who had come to him with an unusual request, had struck him as the sort of dedicated young person who would not take kindly to a hitch in her crusade.

Ellery broke into an undignified lopé.

The project for which she had enlisted his aid was formidable even for a crusading young teacher of Social Studies on the 9th Grade Junior High level. For two months merchants of the neighborhood had

been reporting stores broken into by a teen-age gang. Beyond establishing that the crimes were the work of the same boys, who were probably students at Henry Hudson High School, the police had got nowhere.

Miss Carpenter, walking home from a movie late the previous Monday night, had seen three boys dive out of a smashed bakery window and vanish into an alley. She had recognized them as Howard Ruffo, David Strager, and Joey Buell, all 15-year-old home-room students of hers. The juvenile crime problem was solved.

But not for Miss Carpenter. Instead of going to the police, Miss Carpenter had gone to Ellery, who lived on West 87th Street and was a hero to the

youth of the neighborhood. Howard, David, and Joey were *not* hardened delinquents, she had told him, and she could *not* see their arrest, trial, and imprisonment as the solution to anything. True, they had substituted gang loyalty for the love and security they were denied in their unhappy slum homes, but boys who worked at after-school jobs and turned every cent in at home were hardly beyond recall, were they? And she had told him just where each boy worked, and at what.

"They're only patterning their behavior after criminals because they think criminals are strong, successful, and glamorous," Miss Carpenter had said; and what she would like him to do was visit her class and, under the pretext of giving a talk on the subject of Notorious Criminals I Have Known, paint such a picture of weak, ratting, empty, and violently ending criminality that David and Joey and Howard would see the error of their ways.

It had seemed to Ellery that this placed a rather hefty burden on his oratorical powers. Did Miss Carpenter have her principal's permission for this project?

No, Miss Carpenter had replied bravely, she did *not* have Mr. Hinsdale's permission,

and she might very well lose her job when he heard about it. "But I'm *not* going to be the one who gives those boys the first shove toward reform school and maybe eventually the electric chair!" And besides, what did Mr. Queen have to lose but an hour of his time?

So Mr. Queen had feebly said yes, he would come; and here he was, at the door of the determined young woman's classroom . . . seven minutes late.

Ellery braced himself and opened the door.

The moment he set foot in the room he knew he had walked in on a catastrophe.

Louise Carpenter stood tensely straight at her desk, her pretty face almost as white as the envelope she was clutching. And she was glaring at a mass of boy and girl faces so blankly, so furtively quiet that the silence sizzled.

The first thing she said to him was, "I've been robbed."

The terrible mass of boy and girl eyes followed him to her desk. In his nose was the pungent smell of ink, glue, paper, chalk, musty wardrobe closets; surrounding him were discolored walls, peeling paint, tarnished fixtures, warped window poles, and mutilated desks.

"Robbed in my own class-

room," Miss Carpenter choked.

He laid his coat and hat gently on her desk. "A practical joke?" He smiled at the class.

"Hardly. They didn't know you were coming." They had betrayed her, the sick shock in her voice said. "Class, this is Ellery Queen. I don't have to tell you who Mr. Queen is, and how honored we are to have him visit us." There was a gasp, a buzz, a spatter of applause. "Mr. Queen was kind enough to come here today as a special treat to give us a talk on crime. I didn't know he was going to walk in on one."

"You're sure there has been a crime, Miss Carpenter?"

"An envelope with seven one-dollar bills in it was stolen, and from the way it happened the thief can only be someone in this room."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

He deliberately looked them over, wondering which of the 41 pairs of eyes staring back at his belonged to Joey Buell, Howard Ruffo, and David Strager. He should have asked Louise Carpenter to describe them. Now it was too late.

Or was it?

It seemed to Ellery that three of the 20-odd boy faces were rather too elaborately blank. One of them was set on husky shoulders; this boy was blond, handsome, and dead-

white about the nostrils. The second was a sharp-nosed, jet-haired boy with Mediterranean coloring who was perfectly still except for his fingers, and they kept turning a pencil over and over almost ritually. The third, thin and red-haired, showed no life anywhere except in a frightened artery in his temple.

Ellery made up his mind.

"Well, if it's a real live crime," he said, turning to Louise, "I don't imagine anyone wants to hear me ramble on about crimes that are dead and buried. In fact, I think it would be more interesting if I gave the class a demonstration of how a crime is actually solved. What do you think, Miss Carpenter?"

Understanding leaped into her eyes, along with hope.

"I think," she said grimly, "it would be lots more interesting."

"Suppose we begin by finding out about the seven dollars. They were yours, Miss Carpenter?"

"One dollar was mine. Miss McDoud, an English teacher, is being married next month. A group of us are chipping in to buy her a wedding present, with me as banker. All this week teachers have been dropping in to leave their dollars in an envelope I've had on my desk. This morning—"

OBJECT LESSON

"That's fine for background, Miss Carpenter. Suppose we hear testimony from the class." Ellery surveyed them, and there was a ripple of tittering. Suddenly he pointed to a little lipsticked girl with an Italian haircut. "Would you like to tell us what happened this morning?"

"I don't know anything about the money!"

"Chicken." A boy's jeering voice.

"The boy who said that." Ellery kept his tone friendly. It was one of the three he had spotted, the husky blond one.

"What's your name, son?"

"David Strager." His sneer said, *You don't scare me.* But his nostrils remained dead-white. He was the boy Miss Carpenter had said worked after school as a stock boy at the Hi-Kwality Supermarket on Amsterdam Avenue.

"All right, Dave. You tell us about this morning."

The boy glanced scornfully at the girl with the Italian haircut. "We all knew the money was in the envelope. This morning before the bell rings Mrs. Morell comes in with her buck and Miss Carpenter puts it with the other money and lays the envelope on her desk. So afterward the bell rings, Mrs. Morell beats it out, Miss Carpenter picks up the

envelope and takes a look inside, and she hollers, 'I been robbed.' "

The thin boy with the red hair called out, "So what are we supposed to do, drop dead?" and winked at David Strager, who had already sat down. The big blond boy winked back.

"And your name?" Ellery asked the redhead.

"Joseph Buell," the boy answered defiantly. He was the one who worked at Kaplan's, the big cigar, candy, and stationery store on 89th Street. "Who wants their old seven bucks?"

"Somebody not only wants it, Joey, somebody's got it."

"Aaa, for all we know she took it herself." And this was the third of the trio, the sharp-faced dark boy. If Ellery was right, he was the one who delivered part-time for O'Donnell's Dry Cleaning on Columbus Avenue.

"And you are—?"

"Howard Ruffo."

The Three Musketeers, rushing to one another's support.

"You mean, Howard, you're charging Miss Carpenter with having stolen the teachers' money?" Ellery asked with a smile.

The boy's dark glance wavered. "I mean maybe she took it like by mistake. Mislaid it or somepin'."

"As a matter of fact," came Louise's quiet voice, "when I saw the money wasn't in the envelope, my first thought was exactly that, Mr. Queen. So I searched myself thoroughly."

"May I see the envelope?"

"This isn't the one I was keeping the seven dollars in—" she handed him the envelope—"though it looks the same. I have a box of them in my locker there. The lock hasn't worked for age. This one must have been stolen from my locker yesterday, or earlier this week."

"It's a blank envelope, Miss Carpenter. How do you know it isn't the one that contained the money?"

"Because the original had a notation in ink on the flap—*Gift Fund for Helen McDoud.*" She looked about and glances fell in windrows. "So this theft was planned, Mr. Queen. Someone came to class this morning armed with this duplicate envelope, previously stolen and filled with worthless paper, prepared to make a quick exchange if the opportunity arose. And it did. The class was milling around while Mrs. Morell and I chatted."

The paper in the substitute envelope consisted of a sheaf of rectangular strips cut to the size of dollar bills.

"At the time you placed

Mrs. Morell's dollar among the others in the original envelope, was everybody here?"

"Yes. The door opened and closed only once after that—when Mrs. Morell left. I was facing the door the whole time."

"Could Mrs. Morell, as a practical joke, have made the switch?"

"She wasn't anywhere near my desk after I laid the envelope on it."

"Then you're right, Miss Carpenter. The theft was planned in advance by one of the boys or girls in this room, and the thief—and money—are both still here."

The tension was building beautifully. The boy must be in a sweat. He hadn't expected his theft to be found out so soon, before he got a chance to sneak the money out of the room.

"What time does the first period end, Miss Carpenter?"

"At 9:35."

Every head turned toward the clock on the wall.

"And it's only 8:56," Ellery said cheerfully. "That gives us thirty-nine minutes—more than enough time. Unless the boy or girl who planned this crime wants to return the loot to Miss Carpenter here and now?"

This time he stared directly from David to Howard to Joey. His stare said, *I hate to do this,*

boys, but of course I'll have to if you think you can get away with it.

The Strager boy's full lips were twisted. The skinny redhead, Joey Buell, stared back sullenly. Howard Ruffo's pencil twirled faster.

It's one of those three, all right.

"I see we'll have to do it the hard way," Ellery said. "Sorry I can't produce the thief with a flick of my wrist, the way it's done in books, but in real life, detection—like crime—is pretty unexciting stuff. We'll begin with a body search. It's voluntary, by the way. Anybody rather not chance a search? Raise your hand."

Not a muscle moved.

"I'll search the boys, Miss Carpenter. You roll those two bulletin boards over to that corner and search the girls."

The next few minutes were noisy. As each boy was searched and released he was sent to the blackboard at the front of the room. The girls were sent to the rear.

"Find anything, Miss Carpenter?"

"Rose Perez has a single dollar bill. The other girls either have small change or no money at all."

"No sign of the original envelope?"

"No."

"I found two boys with bills—in each case a single, too. David Strager and Joey Buell. No envelope."

Louise's brows met.

Ellery glanced up at the clock. 9:07.

He strolled over to her. "Don't show them you're worried. There's nothing to worry about. We have twenty-eight minutes." He raised his voice, smiling. "Naturally the thief has ditched the money, hoping to recover it when the coast is clear. It's therefore hidden somewhere in the classroom. All right, Miss Carpenter, we'll take the desks and seats first. Look under them, too—chewing gum makes a handy adhesive. Eh, class?"

Four minutes later they looked at each other, then up at the clock.

9:11.

Exactly 24 minutes remaining.

"Well," said Ellery.

He began to ransack the room. Books, radiators, closets, lunchbags, schoolbags. Bulletin boards, wall maps, the terrestrial globe. The UN poster, the steel engravings of Washington and Lincoln. He even emptied Louise's three pots of geraniums and sifted the earth.

His eyes kept returning to the clock more and more often.

Ellery searched everything in

the room, from the socket of the American flag to the insect-filled bowls of the old light fixtures, reached by standing on desks.

Everything.

"It's not here!" whispered Louise in his ear.

The Buell, Ruffo, and Strager boys were nudging one another, grinning.

"Well, well," Ellery said.

Interesting. Something of a problem at that.

Of course! He got up and checked two things he had missed—the cup of the pencil sharpener and the grid covering the loudspeaker of the PA system. No envelope. No money.

He took out a handkerchief and wiped his neck.

Really, it's a little silly. A schoolboy!

Ellery glanced at the clock.
9:29.

Six minutes left in which not only to find the money but identify the thief!

He leaned against Louise's desk, forcing himself to relax.

It was these "simple" problems. Nothing big and important like murder, blackmail, bank robbery. A miserable seven dollars lifted by a teen-age delinquent in an overcrowded classroom . . .

He thought furiously.

Let the bell ring at 9:35 and

the boy strut out of Miss Carpenter's room undetected, with his loot, and he would send up a howl like a wolf cub over his first kill. *Who says these big-shot law jerks ain't monkeys? The biggest! He's a lot of nothin'. Wind. See me stand him on his ear? And this is just for openers. Wait till I get goin' for real, not any of this kid stuff . . .*

No, nothing big and important like murder. Just seven dollars, and a big shot to laugh at. Not important? Ellery nibbled his lip. It was probably the most important case of his career.

9:30½.

Only four and a half minutes left!

Louise Carpenter was gripping a desk, her knuckles white. Waiting to be let down.

Ellery pushed away from the desk and reached into the patch pocket of his tweed jacket for his pipe and tobacco, thinking harder about Helen McDoud's seven-dollar gift fund than he had ever thought about anything in his life.

And as he thought . . .

At 9:32 he was intently examining the rectangles of paper the thief had put into the substitute envelope. The paper was ordinary cheap newsprint, scissored to dollar-bill size out of a colored comics section. He

shuffled through the dummy dollars one by one, hunting for something. Anything!

The 41 boys and girls were buzzing and giggling now.

Ellery pounced. Clinging to one of the rectangles was a needle-thin sliver of paper about an inch long; a sort of paper shaving. He fingered it, held it up to the light. It was not newsprint. Too full-bodied, too tough-textured . . .

Then he knew what it must be.

Less than two minutes left.

Feverishly he went through the remaining dollar-sized strips of comic paper.

And there it was. There it was!

This strip had been cut from the top of the comic sheet. On the margin appeared the name of a New York newspaper and the date April 24, 1955.

Think it over. Take your time. Lots of seconds in a minute.

The buzzing and giggling had died. Louise Carpenter was on her feet, looking at him imploringly.

A bell began clanging in the corridor.

First period over.

9:35.

Ellery rose and said solemnly, "The case is solved."

With the room cleared and

the door locked, the three boys stood backed against the blackboard as if facing a firing squad. The bloom was gone from David Strager's cheeks. The blood vessel in Joey Buell's temple was trying to wriggle into his red hair. And Howard Ruffo's eyes were liquid with panic.

It's hard to be fifteen years old and trapped.

But harder not to be.

"Whad I do?" whimpered Howard Ruffo. "I didn't do nothin'."

"We didn't take Miss Carpenter's seven dollars," said David Strager, stiff-lipped.

"Can you say the same about Mr. Mueller's baked goods last Monday night, Dave?" Ellery paused gently. "Or any of the other things you boys have been stealing in the past two months?"

He thought they were going to faint.

"But this morning's little job," Ellery turned suddenly to the red-haired boy, "you pulled by yourself, Joey."

The thin boy quivered. "Who, me?"

"Yes, Joey, you."

"You got rocks in your skull," Joey whispered. "Not me!"

"I'll prove it, Joey. Hand me the dollar bill I found in your jeans when I searched you."

"That's my dollar!"

"I know it, Joey. I'll give you another for it. Hand it over . . . Miss Carpenter."

"Yes, Mr. Queen!"

"To cut these strips of newspaper to the same size as dollar bills, the thief must have used a real bill as a pattern. If he cut too close, the scissors would shave off a sliver of the bill." Ellery handed her Joey's dollar. "See if this bill shows a slight indentation along one edge."

"It does!"

"And I found this sliver clinging to one of the dummies. Fit the sliver to the indented edge of Joey's bill. If Joey is guilty, it should fit exactly. Does it?"

Louise looked at the boy. "Joey, it does fit."

David and Howard were gaping at Ellery.

"What a break," Joey choked.

"Criminals make their own bad breaks, Joey. The thing inside you that told you you were doing wrong made your hand shake as you cut. But even if your hand hadn't slipped, I'd have known you were the one who substituted the strips of paper for the money."

"How? How could you?" It was a cry of bewilderment.

Ellery showed him the rectangular strip with the white

margin. "See this, Joey? Here's the name of the newspaper, and the date is April 24, 1955. What date is today?"

"Friday the 22nd . . ."

"Friday, April 22nd. But these strips of colored comics come from the newspaper of April 24th, Joey—*this coming Sunday's paper*. Who gets advance copies of the Sunday comics? Stores that sell newspapers in quantity. Getting the bulldog editions in advance gives them a jump on the Sunday morning rush, when they have to insert the news sections.

"Nothing to it, Joey. Which of you three boys had access before this morning to next Sunday's bulldog editions? Not David—he works in a supermarket. Not Howard—he works for a dry cleaner. But you work in a big cigar and stationery store, Joey, where newspapers must be one of the stock items."

Joey Buell's eyes glassed over.

"We think we're strong, Joey, and then we run into somebody stronger," Ellery said. "We think we're the smartest, and someone comes along to outsmart us. We beat the rap a dozen times, but the thirteenth time the rap beats us. You can't win, Joey."

Joey burst into tears.

Louise Carpenter made an

nstinctive gesture toward him. Ellery's head-shake warned her back. He went close to the boy and tousled the red head, murmuring something the others could not hear. And after a while Joey's tears sniffled to an end and he wiped his eyes on his sleeve in a puzzled way.

"Because I think this is going to work out all right, Joey," Ellery said, continuing their curious colloquy aloud. "We'll have a session with Mr. Hinsdale, and then with some pretty right guys I happen to know at Police Headquarters. After that it will be up to you."

Joey Buell gulped. "Okay, Mr. Queen." He did not look at his two friends.

David and Howard communicated silently. Then David turned to Ellery. "Where do we stand, Mr. Queen?"

"You and Howard are coming along."

The blond boy bit his lip. Then he nodded, and after a moment the dark boy nodded, too.

"Oh, I almost forgot." Ellery dipped briskly into the jacket pocket that held his pipe and tobacco. His hand reappeared with a wrinkled envelope, its flap written over. From the envelope protruded the corners of some one-dollar bills. "Your Helen McDoud wedding gift fund, Miss Carpenter. With Joey's compliments."

"I did forget!" gasped Louise. "Where did you find it?"

"Where Joey in desperation slipped it as I was frisking the other boys. The only thing in the room I didn't think of searching—my own pocket. Coming fellas?"



Philip Wylie

The Paradise Canyon Mystery

Jim Preston, a graduate engineer, couldn't get the kind of job he really wanted; so, being an Olympic swimming champion, he took a job as swimming instructor at the swank Paradise Canyon Hotel, in the desert near Death Valley. Well, Jim hadn't been on the job long enough to have a single meal at the hotel before he found himself in the midst of mystery—danger and death, menace and murder...

Here is what could be called a new kind of detective. Nearly every profession and vocation (and avocation) has produced amateur sleuths—rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief (all of whom have appeared in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine disguised as detectives), as well as doctor, lawyer, Indian chief (all of whom have also doubled as detectives in EQMM). But an Olympic swimming champion! That's a new one!

From the Golden Thirties, the Golden Age of the pure-in-heart Amateur Detective, we bring you this carefully plotted short novel, complete in this anthology; an unusual locale is only one of the attractive features of this story, by a writer whose work never failed to be inventive and interesting...

Detective: JIM PRESTON

It was 3:20, A.M. Jim heaved his battered suitcases from beneath the day-coach seats and walked past sleeping passengers to the vestibule. A solitary red light slid through the blackness, and the train stopped. "Paradise Canyon!" a voice shouted.

He descended to the lowest step and jumped. He gazed toward the station. A pale lamp made one window yellow. Somebody else was getting off the train. He looked at the sky, where the Dippers swung in dim tandem around the Polar Star.

That was familiar—but not the sky's rim: jagged, lofty perimeter of mountains, from the summits of which snow and ice cast ghostly reflections down on the desert where he stood.

The desert! Jim took a long inhalation of sharper air than he had ever breathed before and smelled dust and mesquite and cactus blossoms invisible in the enshrouding night. Then, carrying his luggage, he walked toward the lamps of the one car parked beside the station. Its driver followed the other nocturnal arrival, pushing a trunk and several bags in a handcart. The other arrival was a woman.

"Mr. Preston?"

"Right!" Jim called to the driver.

"I'll load your stuff in the trunk on the rear." He turned to the woman. "You don't mind another person? It's Mr. Preston, the new swimming instructor."

"I don't mind a bit. How do you do, Mr. Preston?"

"Thanks," Jim said. To himself, he grinned. They had told him in New York that the Paradise Canyon Hotel was snooty. But having to ask a guest if she would ride in the same car with the swimming director certainly was snootiness of the foremost rank. Ed, the driver, finished loading the

luggage and handed them a lap robe. He started the car.

For ten lengthy minutes they drove through the darkness, and the girl did not speak. Jim had noticed that she wore a fur coat, had a tilted nose, wasn't tall, used a bittersweet perfume that smelled like the desert, and that her voice was low and melodious.

Then his attention wandered from the girl at his side to an examination of the novel and fascinating objects which he glimpsed in the beam of the headlights: cacti, palms, poinsettias, adobe walls, dunes.

At the end of ten minutes he said, almost unconsciously, "It's grand!"

He could tell that the girl was smiling. "The desert?" she asked. "Never seen it before?"

"No."

"It's fun. My stepfather enjoys it because of the hunting. Mother likes to be where she can see movie stars in the flesh."

"Where's your home?"

"Cleveland." She was silent for a time. Then she said, "You aren't Jimmy Preston, the Olympic champion, by any chance, are you?"

"Yes."

"You sound as if you resented being an Olympic champion," she said.

Jim pondered that. In a way

he did resent it. The whole world was excited about his time for swimming 100 yards and about the way he dived. But nobody had been especially interested in a scrappy, red-headed kid who augmented his mother's pitiful wages by hawking newspapers, who worked his way through school and college, and had earned a degree in engineering, with honors.

The desert road unrolled beneath the wheels of the car. Athletic ability had helped him to travel; it had made his undergraduate days easier. But he had always felt it was unfair that his full twist dive interested more people than his engineering degree. And after graduation, though no one had wanted hydro-electric plants designed by him, a great many people desired his services as a coach.

He had fought against it for four years, but finally had accepted the offer of the Paradise Canyon Hotel to be pool tender and instructor of its guests. He had wanted from boyhood to be an engineer. Now he was a professional athlete.

He said, "On the contrary. Can you imagine an easier life?"

"It must be swell!" She was trying to be nice, to make him feel that she did not mind the

social and cultural gap she assumed he felt to exist between them.

"Just dandy! Following the sun. Miami and the desert in the winter. Northern resorts in summer. Making a living by playing!"

"Elegant!" This, he thought was to be his due all winter—the patronage of the rich. A good many of them wouldn't even try to flatter his feelings. They'd just order him like a servant: "I want my water wings inflated and ready at ten, Mr. Preston!"

The car turned under an arch, swept through a double row of tall palms, and stopped in front of an immense hotel, where everyone was sleeping and only the elevator shafts, the lobby, and fire exits showed lights.

When their eyes were accustomed to the brightness of the lobby they faced each other in common curiosity. Frankie Bailey laughed. "You've got red hair and blue eyes! I thought you were dark!"

He grinned. "And you've got black hair. I'd have bet you were a blonde."

"Why?"

"Can't say. The perfume?"

Her eyes were surprised, as if swimming instructors should not know the difference between the proper perfume for

blondes and brunettes. Gray eyes, she had, set wide apart.

The night clerk came forward. "Miss Bailey! I'm delighted! Your mother and father are in Bungalow 15—same one you had last year."

"I'll sneak in, and go to sleep. I'm dead! Good night, Mr. Preston."

"Oh, Preston," the clerk said. "Your quarters are on the top floor—Room 611. I haven't a boy to help you with your things—"

Jim looked pleasantly at the clerk. "I can manage." He watched Frankie Bailey cross the lobby and go through a rear door into a garden. He stared for a moment at the luxurious furniture in the vast room, at the paintings of the mountains, at the embers in the huge stone fireplace. Then he started toward the elevators.

His room was larger than the clammy manner of the clerk had led him to expect. It had four windows, and Navaho rugs on the floor, a comfortable bed with wool blankets, three chairs, a desk, prints of desert flowers, and a private bath. He looked at his watch. 4:30. Soon be light.

He didn't feel sleepy. The new universe he was to inhabit lay unknown all around him. So he took a shower and shaved. Not knowing the conventional

desert costume, he put on the same clothes he had worn on the train. Then he went down to the main floor.

The clerk was still at his desk.

"I'm going out for a stroll," Jim said. "Just to look the land over. When can I get some breakfast?"

"At six, here. Anytime, downtown." The clerk yawned at him.

Jim walked down the palm avenue in the dark. Beyond it was a street that led to the red radiance of neon signs. He turned toward them and found an all-night restaurant. He had coffee and eggs.

Then he continued his walk. Forty or fifty stores, three hotels, a couple of hundred homes, a golf course, a movie theater, a half dozen tearooms and cafés—and, surrounding them, the desert.

It became lighter. He found a trail that led toward the base of the seemingly overhanging peaks and followed it.

Soon the world through which he walked became very silent. The trail underfoot was stony. It meandered through a dry, light undergrowth of stuff he didn't know—bushes and plants and leafless trees and cacti that were like barrels and others that were like octopuses, and still others that were like

railway semaphores—grotesque, impossible, meaningless in the murky light.

Then he began to climb, and realized that he was on the mountainside. Beyond the town the gray desert floor rolled toward invisibility. He climbed up the path through boulders and slabs of rock.

Finally he sat down on one of them. He remembered that there were rattlesnakes in the desert, and hopped up to examine his environment, but it was untenanted.

Then dawn began to break. Lemon light hovered in the east. Behind him the snow fields became blue, then salmon, then gold, and, finally, blazing white. Colors surged across the desert floor—here a greenish carpet, there a pink dune, far away an abyss of cobalt blue. Whole mountains of purple and red shot up in the distance.

When the first warm rays of the sun touched him he took off his coat. The cool and moving air before sunrise stood still. Warmth became heat. The colors were bleached out before his gaze. He did not budge until the full and majestic ritual was finished, until the dye was gone from the scenery and only a furnacelike radiance remained. Then he looked at his watch. It was after 6:00.

As he made the movement there was a remote but sharp crack, and his tie flickered. He looked down, alarmed, thinking of snakes. There was a gash in his tie that had cut it almost in half.

Someone had shot at him.

He started toward the direction of the sound for a split second, and jumped down behind the boulder on which he had been sitting.

A voice floated unreally to his ears. "Hey!" it said.

"Hey!" Jim yelled back, half in fright and half in anger.

What had happened? Jim peered around his refuge. Far away, along the side of the mountain, he saw the figure of a man scrambling toward him. The man was calling, "Are you hurt?"

"No!" Jim bellowed back.

"Wait there!"

Minute by minute the man came nearer. He was obviously moving fast, but for a long time he looked like a fly crawling on a wall. Finally the man was near. "I'm sorry!" he called.

He wore breeches and puttees and a flannel shirt. He had a goatee. His face was very white. He was middle-aged, but he moved with a hard alacrity.

"You're not hit?" the man said, as he came up.

"Nope. Only my necktie. But what's?"

The man stared at Jim. His eyes were not exactly frightened. Excited, rather. "It's that brown shirt. Just the right color. Faded, isn't it?"

Jim ignored the slight upon his haberdashery. "Right color for what?"

"A lion. Panther. Light was poor. I was using my telescopic sight. Your back here—just like a lion's—when you moved. You're lucky. Astonishing you aren't dead. Can't understand missing. Must be a strong air eddy up the hillside . . . Oh. My name's Dr. Galt. I'm a guest at the Paradise Canyon Hotel."

"Mine's Preston. I'm the new swimming instructor there. Out for a walk. Where's your rifle?"

The doctor was by then quite calm. He smiled. "Left it, to expedite getting here. Thought you'd fallen back, hit. Don't bother about the gun. I'll send some of the boys out to find it. What do you say we go back?"

"Thanks," Jim answered, "but I'm going to walk a bit farther."

"Right. Oh, right. By the way—bill me for a new tie—eh?"

"Sure," Jim said.

The doctor started down the path. Jim stared at his back. Funny bird. Any normal person would have been frightened nearly to death by so close an

approach to manslaughter. Bill me for the tie!

Jim climbed back on the rock. Shaking like a leaf! he said to himself. Then he began to laugh. "Some place," he said to nothing. "Been here three hours and I see the handsomest girl ever made, and the best sunrise, and the biggest jackass."

He started back.

He had crossed about half of the desert floor that lay between the mountain's precipitous foot and the village, when he stopped sharply. There was a crackling in the brush along the trail. He was frightened again. He thought, now, not of snakes, but of the lions the doctor had mentioned. What did one do for lions? He grabbed up a large rock, and waited.

A horse walked easily from the bushes, saw him, and stopped.

Jim greeted it with relief. "Hello, horse!" He dropped the rock. The horse moved a step nearer, looking at Jim. There was a saddle on it, but nobody in the saddle. This desert, he thought, is thick with people. He raised his voice so that it would canvass the adjoining acres: "Hey! Anybody lost a horse?"

Nobody replied. Jim chuckled. Doubtless somebody taking an early ride had been thrown.

The rider was walking back—and so was the horse. So, gently calling, "Whoa, boy!" he started toward it. The horse was big and handsome. There was silver filigree on the saddle.

Jim caught the bridle. He started to lead the horse. And then he stopped.

Why not ride? He went round the horse. The left stirrup was gone. "Well!" Jim exclaimed. He looked at its attachment. It was the sort that comes free if a fallen rider catches his foot and is in danger of being dragged. Someone had taken a really nasty spill. Better hurry in; help might be needed.

But Jim didn't hurry. His exploratory hand came away from the saddle with blood on it. Then he observed that on the off side blood had trickled down the cinch. The saddle, in front, was soggy with blood. But where the horseman had sat, it was clean. That meant the rider had started to bleed on his horse, fallen, caught his foot, and pulled the stirrup free.

Jim tied the horse to a bush. He hurried off in the direction from which the animal had come. He followed the tracks for a hundred yards and then lost them in the tracks made by other desert riders. He called out, but was not answered.

He ran back to the trail,

untied the horse, and started leading it toward town. He was within sight of the spot where the paved street began when he saw a man coming toward him. It was Dr. Galt.

"I thought," the doctor said, as he approached, "I'd come back and intercept you. See you've found somebody's mount. Why didn't you ride in?"

Jim was going to tell him, and then checked himself.

"Want you to do me a favor." Dr. Galt tugged at his black goatee. "If you will . . . Say nothing about the little—accident—we had this morning. I'd hate to have it known that my carelessness with a firearm—you understand that?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to say something about it. Look."

The other man followed Jim's finger. While he examined the bloodstains Jim scrutinized him. He lost color. That was all. "Somebody's had a bad fall."

"You think so?"
"I imagine so. Fallen—cut himself—mounted again—and perhaps fainted from loss of blood."

"Or been shot."
The doctor's face sagged. "Good heavens! But that's absurd! Preposterous!" Then he caught Jim's shoulders in strong fingers. "Look here. If the rider has been shot, then I must

recover the rifle at once! That'll be my insurance against any such suspicion... See here, young man, if you implicate me by telling of our misadventure this morning, you'll only confuse the issue and give—but why presume?"

"That's what I was wondering," Jim answered. "Did you by any chance hear a shot this morning?"

The doctor did not reply. He started rapidly toward the mountain. "Be back in an hour," he called.

The man was either crazy, or guilty of something, or both. Jim considered chasing him. Instead, he hurried into town.

In 15 minutes he learned that the horse belonged to the hotel riding master, a man named Poling, and that Poling had gone out at five, alone. In the same 15 minutes the two policemen of Paradise Canyon had organized a posse, on horses and in cars, to look for Poling.

Jim went into the hotel. There was life there now, and now, for the first time, he saw it completely. Besides the six-story building, with its lobby-lounge and vast dining room, there was, on the side toward the mountain, a series of landscaped streets lined with Spanish bungalows.

There were gardens and

fountains. A brook meandered through the private village. There were three tennis courts. In the distance was the swimming pool. From the rear veranda of the building he could see the diving platforms and the bathhouses.

At one corner, down the farthest of the short streets, were stables and a riding ring—all in all, a sumptuous and charming arrangement for living healthfully, if expensively, in the sun. A man in white flannels approached Jim.

"Mr. Preston?"

"Yes."

"I'm Howard, the manager. Glad you're here. Had breakfast yet?"

"Not yet. That is—I had some very early."

The man was tall and blond. He had a wide, pleasant face and a not quite pleasant mouth.

In a few words Jim described his adventures. The shock that Jim's narrative made on Mr. Howard was only less noticeable than his effort to accept the story casually. His big face became absolutely bloodless.

He said, "Very strange that Poling should get hurt while riding. He was an expert. But you can never tell—"

"I suppose not."

Howard seemed anxious to be rid of Jim. He waved his arm.

"I'll show you around when you've eaten. Go to the rear dining room, near the kitchen. Ask for Sam."

"Thanks." Jim walked through the dining room, thinking to himself that whatever had happened, Howard had a hunch about it and it had frightened him.

He pushed open the kitchen door and yelled for Sam.

A jovial, rugged-looking man in a waiter's coat hurried up. Jim identified himself, and, for the first time, he was made to feel that his advent to Paradise Canyon was not an intrusion.

"Oh—yes. Mr. Preston. I'll hustle you some breakfast. Just ask for anything. I'm the person to get it for you." He hurried into the kitchen and returned with oatmeal and silverware. "Hear you had a narrow squeak this morning."

"You did? What did you think of it?"

"I don't ever think—just listen." Sam laughed. "And you found Poling's horse."

"Yeah." Jim ate.

"He'll be the maddest man in the county. He used to be a cowboy. Came here from Texas. Why, that bird could ride standing on one hand!"

Sam went out laughing. He returned very quietly—with Jim's eggs. "They just brought Poling in," he said.

Jim looked up, startled.

"Shot—through the heart."

"Oh," Jim said.

Sam was very serious. "I guess Dr. Galt'll have a lot of explaining to do."

"Did they know each other?"

"Yeah. They did. And didn't like each other. Poling has made a joke around here of the way Galt rode. And last year Poling took two thousand dollars from the doctor at a bridge game. They both thought they were good at both things."

"Still—" Jim said.

Sam shrugged. "You never know how far a razzing may get under a guy's skin."

Jim went back to the lobby, after thanking Sam for serving his breakfast. Mr. Howard took him to the pool and showed him the system for keeping records, the water-heating plant, the filter, and the chlorinator.

When that was finished, Jim was summoned by the two local cops and the Mayor. He repeated his story. He didn't learn much. Poling had been popular. They had found him in the mesquite, with a .30-.40 rifle bullet lodged against his backbone. He hadn't died instantly. He'd kept in the saddle for fifty feet, trailing blood. Then he'd fallen.

And, lying there, he'd tried,

with his last drop of consciousness, to write something in the sand. His finger had scrawled a letter G. That was all. G was Galt's initial. And Galt was still missing.

Afterward Jim returned to the pool, to his new duties. It was ten o'clock. He sat down in a canvas chair. He couldn't get his mind off the red saddle.

A handsome blonde girl came to the pool. Her face was so familiar that Jim said, "Hello!" and then racked his brain in an effort to place her. She smiled and said, "Hello," and dived. She dived neatly, and it was only when she came up that Jim realized he did not know her at all, personally. She was Arlina McKay, of Diamond Pictures.

He was still blushing when another girl said, "Good morning!"

He turned. Frankie Bailey was approaching with an older woman who looked like her and a man of about thirty, tall, bony, and bespectacled. "My mother, Mrs. Farnham," she said. "Mr. Preston. We drove here together last night. And Mr. Willet, my fiancé."

Jim was surprised that Frankie was engaged to such a person. She looked, in the bright daylight, like a calm and quiet person with a good sense

of humor and a love of life. Willet was apparently humorless, irascible, and fond, if not of books, at least of chairs.

She walked out on the diving board, looked up, made her four-step run, and did a competent half gainer.

Willet began to talk, chattily, as if he seldom stopped. "Nice diver. Loves sports. Fine girl. Told me about your ride up here last night. Said you were a champion, or something. Can't go in for such things myself. Weak constitution. Why not get out and show her up? She needs discipline. I'm sure I can't do anything with her. Not even make her marry me, after four years of steady effort."

"Herb!" Mrs. Farnham said. "Maybe Mr. Preston isn't interested in the troubles you have with our Frankie."

"Should be," Herb answered. "All the gossip columnists are. Print the whole sad story annually. Where's Galt, Mother? Always around here putting the evil eye on Frankie. Probably taking one of his morning walks."

He looked at Jim as if soliciting sympathy. "This fellow Galt has been chasing Frankie here on the desert every winter. Though I don't think Frankie likes him especially."

"Herb!" Mrs. Farnham said

again. "I think I'll knit. Do you mind running back to my cottage for my knitting bag?"

"Not a bit." He started limply toward the bungalows.

"Mr. Preston," Mrs. Farnham said, "I presume Herb will be here at the pool a lot. Don't mind him."

Jim, who had been completely flabbergasted by the man's intimate, rambling discourse, answered earnestly, "I won't."

"But don't pity him, either. He's really quite bright."

"Sometimes," Frankie called, climbing out of the pool.

Jim walked along the edge to meet her. "Look," he said, "you'll hear about this any minute, so I'm going to tell you." And in a few sentences he gave her the high points of the morning's tragedy.

"It's too terrible to seem real," she said when he had finished. "But I know Harry Galt well—"

"So your fiancé said."

She regarded him harshly. "Mr. Preston, you're new here. You don't know the people. Somebody may have shot Ted Poling, but it wasn't the doctor."

"You don't happen to know what kind of rifle Dr. Galt had, do you?"

"I should. I gave it to him. It was a .30-.40."

The group of swimmers had commenced to emerge from the dressing rooms. Jim turned toward them, but he said to the girl, "That's what killed the riding master. A .30-.40 rifle."

She lost all her color.

Jim assumed that under normal conditions the afternoon would be very gay. People would crowd the pool and the tennis courts. The orchestra would play at 4:00 on the veranda. But on this day few people engaged in sports, and the grounds were dotted with small clusters of persons, sitting and standing, talking.

Mr. Howard, the manager, had told Jim that on warm evenings he was to keep the pool open, with floodlights on, till ten o'clock. He did so, although no one came to swim.

Sam brought his supper in containers. He had little information. "They're having the coroner's jury tomorrow. Hundred people out hunting for Galt. Some detectives from Los Angeles flew in at noon. But I don't think they'll get anywhere."

"Why?"

"Because Galt was smart. He probably figured a getaway before he shot the guy."

Sam left. Jim heard him walking through the orange trees toward the main building.

He pulled a table up to the low wall around the pool and spread his supper on it. He sat down, out of the glare of the lights, and began to eat.

Something fell with a splash into the pool near where he sat. Puzzled, Jim rose and went over to see what it was. He bent over the illuminated water and caught the flash of a sinking object. Then he was shoved hard from behind.

He sank, pushed on the bottom, swam a few strokes, and surged up on the deck. There was nobody.

He ran into the dark, dripping, and tried to see who had crept up to duck him. He observed nobody. Then he hurried back to the pool and looked along its bottom. He saw something shiny there. He plunged in again and came up with it. A half dollar.

Someone had tossed a half dollar into the water and when he'd gone to see what it was, shoved him in. That was absurd. Senseless. Maybe somebody—Frankie's dopey fiancé, for example—was trying to kid him. A poor time for practical jokes.

He called the desk on the pool phone. Mr. Howard heard his report. "Change your clothes, Preston," he said, "and come over here. I'll have men search the grounds."

Jim changed into slacks and

a jersey. That, he had observed, was the prevailing costume. He did not turn out the lights around the pool and, as he left, he looked rather ruefully at his untouched supper . . . He felt his scalp prickle.

His meal was untouched no longer. The plate, on which had been steak and vegetables, was gone! He'd been ducked so his meal could be swiped—by someone who had no other access to food. That meant—Galt.

He ran to the main office.

The grounds of the hotel were quietly ransacked. But hunting in the night proved useless.

When Jim came out of Howard's office he saw Frankie, her mother, Mr. Willet, and a dozen others playing Bingo at a long oak table on the porch. Frankie was wearing a pale-green evening dress. She looked, he thought, like a daffodil. He paused involuntarily.

She read numbers: "Seventy-one." She dropped the ticket in a bowl. The players put down counters on their cards. "Eight." "Fifteen."

"Bingo!" an elderly man called. He read off his numbers, and another girl handed him a dishful of silver coins.

Frankie beckoned to Jim. "Want to play?"

He shook his head slightly.

She came to his side. "Come on! It's all right—if I invite you." She gestured toward a man with gray hair. "This is Mr. Farnham, my stepfather—Mr. Preston."

The man turned. Jim estimated that he weighed 250 pounds. He had slaty eyes. Farnham, Jim later learned, was a steel manufacturer with a reputation for hardness and violence.

"How do you do?" he mumbled.

Jim sat down and bought a card. He had feared that the stakes would be too high. But the people at the table—all of them rich—were playing for dimes. Mr. Willet, across the table, gave a caricature of a salute. "Good evening, champ!"

Jim played for an hour, and lost twenty cents. Then the game broke up. He had enjoyed himself. It was only when he reached his own room that he remembered he had not slept at all on the previous night. He undressed and went to bed, and did not waken until the telephone operator called to tell him that it was 6:30.

The inquest was held in the moving-picture theater at ten. Jim gave his testimony first. Next, Mr. Farnham gave a brief biographical sketch of Dr. Galt. Frankie described the rifle she had given him for Christmas.

Three cowboys from the riding stables told about the feud between Poling and Galt. One of them said that Mr. Farnham had made an appointment to meet Poling at the riding master's ranch on the afternoon of his death. Farnham readily admitted it. He was going to plan a hunting trip, he said.

A verdict was withheld, pending the finding of Galt. Search parties were organized. A special effort was made to cover the vicinity in which Galt had hidden when he shot at Jim. Jim, himself, with detectives, went over every step of his walk. But the rifle was not found, although a score of men tramped all day in the fiery sun.

Late that afternoon Jim went to the post office to collect a shipment of bathing suits and shoes he was to sell at the pool. On the way back he met Frankie coming out of a dress shop. She invited him to play Bingo again that night, and they strolled to the hotel together. He asked where Herb Willet was.

"Working on the case," she answered.

He grinned. "What does he expect to uncover?"

Frankie was almost indignant. "I wouldn't laugh too much at Herb. He's chattery, a silly man—if you like. But he's

an authority on ligulae."

"Ligulae?"

"What the dictionary calls 'a genus of mollusks'."

"Oh. Oh, I see."

"And that's not funny, either. To be an authority on that you have to wade in the Everglades in Florida. Fight snakes, panthers, swamps."

"And what has he found out about—Poling?"

"He hasn't said."

"I'll ask him."

"Do. But don't come to play Bingo unless you have the proper respect for Herb. I like him."

He smiled at her. "That," he said, "makes him okay with me."

The orchestra played again that evening. Mr. Howard wanted to revive the morale of his guests. Poling's body had been taken ten miles away to his ranch. He was to be buried in another town. The bar was busy again. When Jim closed the pool for the evening and strolled over to the hotel, he was aware of the effort to dissipate the miasma that had hung over the community.

He was wearing gray flannels and a blue coat, the best his wardrobe afforded. He had whitened his shoes. He might have been one of the sons of the heavy, assured hotel guests rather than an employee. He

was introduced to several people.

A Mrs. Voight, sleek and past forty, was especially interested in Jim. She held his hand for so long that Frankie winked at him. "I had no idea there was a swimming master!" she said. Diamonds glittered on her fingers. "I must take some lessons. I'm *terrified* of water. I have a splendid idea! Won't you join my panning expedition on Friday?"

Jim grinned uncomfortably. "Panning expedition?" he echoed.

"Gold panning. There are places here where you can really pan it out. A few cents' worth. And I'm getting up a party—"

"If I can get away—" Jim answered. "Can you really—?"

Mr. Farnham spoke. "Pan gold here? Not enough to pay. But it's a stunt."

Down the table Herb said, "If you knew the right spot, maybe you wouldn't have to pan. Death Valley isn't far away, you know. And right around here, in the early days, they used to take out fortunes."

"How interesting," said a mousy lady.

Herb immediately agreed with her—and with himself. "It is," he went on with trivial enthusiasm. "Absorbing. Ro-

mantic. Talk to one of the old hermits who come into town for grub occasionally. You've seen 'em. Some of them are the sons of Forty-niners who are still poking around on the desert for millions their fathers found and lost. Not altogether absurdly, either. Ten years ago one of those old desert rats struck a pocket with half a million in it. Right outside Paradise Canyon. And legends, Mrs. Vandermahlen! The lost Cosset claim. The lost Golden Gregg. Supposed to have been a cavern. Fabulous country—"

"Let's play," Mr. Farnham said impatiently.

"Let's." Frankie handed the bowl of numbers to Miss Waite, the pretty hostess of the hotel. She collected the dimes and began to draw numbers. Jim started to fill his board, as did Frankie, sitting beside him. After a few minutes she whispered, "I've only got one place on two rows to put me out."

"I'll bet I win," Jim answered. "I have three rows ready to shoot."

"Thirty-seven!" Miss Waite called.

"Bingo!" Frankie and Jim spoke simultaneously.

"You'll have to split the pot," the hostess said. "Read your numbers. Miss Bailey?"

Before she checked her

count, Frankie held out her hand to Jim. "The winnahs!" she said. They shook. And from the downward glance to her hand, Jim's eyes traveled to his newly whitened shoes. He pulled one foot toward his chair leg. There was a henna stain on it—a stain like partly dried varnish.

He bent farther down. Frankie's attention was attracted to the movement. He touched the stuff and looked at his fingers. He glanced around the table. No one was noticing him. Frankie was reading off her score.

Jim stretched back so that he could see the long board running the length of the table and the wider centerboard beneath its top. He raised an edge of the cloth cover. In that way he could see the legs of the people across from him, the baseboard on which was a lot of the stuff that had marked his shoe, and a section of the shelf-like reinforcement under the top. On it was a body.

There was not enough light to identify it. Frankie glanced down, faltered, and went on. He realized that she, too, had seen.

Then Herb dropped one of his game boards on the floor. He ducked and groped for it for several seconds.

Frankie finished counting,

and the prize money was handed to her.

People began to talk in preparation for the next game. Frankie whispered frantically to Jim, "Who is it?"

Herb, white-faced, leaned toward them and whispered, "It's Galt. There's a knife in his back." His voice barely reached Jim. "We've got to break up the game before anyone else sees him."

Frankie looked at Jim with agonized eyes. "I—I—can't—play—now—" she whispered to him. "Oh—"

Jim caught her hand. "You've got to!" He addressed the table. "I'm going to play three boards at the same time, then quit."

Farnham said, "What the deuce are you young people scheming?"

"To beat you again," Herb said amiably. "This is going to be my last tonight, too. Getting late." He yawned delicately.

Of the three people who knew about the body under the table, only Herb Willet was able to put his counters on the proper numbers. In fact, he won. "Bingo!" he cried finally. "Well! Victory at last! I'm going to knock off—on that one."

Mrs. Voight eyed Jim. "It's so early—and such a beautiful night—"

Jim stretched ostentatiously. "Got to turn in. I get up at six thirty. Well—"

People began to rise. Curiously enough, the three who had precipitated the departures sat in their places.

There were good nights.

They waited till the porch was empty. Then Jim and Herb bent down simultaneously.

"It's Dr. Galt, all right," Jim said.

"Stabbed—" Herb whispered.

Frankie was trembling. "Let's get Mr. Howard—right away."

They went into Mr. Howard's office. A clerk summoned him from his bungalow. Ten minutes later a Captain Spencer from Los Angeles joined them with one of the Paradise Canyon officers.

Spencer was a small, wizened, very tanned person with a pleasant voice. The men walked to the porch and pulled down the shutters by which it was enclosed during the summer. Then they drew the blinds along the inside windows.

The Los Angeles policeman got down on his knees and looked at the body for a full five minutes, crawling along the floor. Then he grunted, "Lend me a hand."

Jim and the local officer aided him in carrying the body

to a sofa. Dr. Galt's eyes were shut. He had not bled much. They turned him on his face. Protruding from his left shoulder was the handle of a knife.

Spencer said absently, "Now—what about the idea that this man shot Poling?"

"He could still have done it—and be killed by someone else," the local officer said.

"Yeah. He *could* have."

Frankie spoke in a high and jittery voice. "How did he get here? Why did they put him under that table? Suppose—he'd rolled off when—!"

Spencer said reprovingly, "I'm afraid you'll have to leave, Miss Bailey. A murder is never thrilling. It's invariably—ugly—and unnerving."

Frankie made an effort to control herself. "I have to stay. You see—I talked with Dr. Galt—yesterday afternoon."

Spencer raised his eyebrows. Everyone else was thunderstruck. He said, "Do you want to dictate your story?"

"No. I'll tell it. As often as you like. It isn't much. You already know that"—she gestured expressively toward the body—"he is—was—one of the most famous surgeons in the Middle West. He saved lives. He didn't take them."

"Miss Bailey—please—!" the Captain said.

"I'm getting to it. I knew he was hiding out, staying away, for some decent reason. And I imagined he'd be near here. Maybe watching us all. So I walked up on the mountainside yesterday afternoon alone and stood in plain view of half the desert for an hour.

"I didn't see him coming till he was almost beside me. We sat down and talked. He said that missing Mr. Preston so narrowly had alarmed him. He said he had been afraid of murder even then. He'd heard a shot, earlier in the morning, while he was hunting. He wanted to get back his rifle right away—to clear himself.

"While he was hunting for his gun, he saw the riders find Mr. Poling. So he slipped down there and learned that a .30-.40 rifle bullet had killed him. Then he knew he *had* to have his own gun so he could show it wasn't the one that had been used.

"He hunted all day. He told me that the posses looking for him sometimes came within a few yards of him. But the very ease with which he hid explained why he couldn't find his rifle. Every rock was like every other.

"Toward five he worked his way back along the mountainside—till he saw me. He asked me to say nothing to anyone—for the time being." She said to

Jim, for no reason, "I didn't like Dr. Galt much. But I *was* relieved."

Spencer sniffed. "Very praiseworthy of you! You didn't suggest, by any chance, that if his yarn were true he could come in any time? If his gun *hadn't* been used, and was on the slope, it would eventually have been found—and cleared him."

Frankie hesitated. "It wasn't to clear himself that he was staying out in the desert."

"What do you mean?"

"He told me all about hunting for his gun. Then he said that there was a great deal more happening in Paradise Canyon than the mere killing of a riding master. Those were his exact words.

"He *started* to tell me. He said he hadn't been hunting lions—exclusively—at any time this season. He'd been investigating. Whether he would have told me what he was investigating or not, I don't know. A crowd of people rode over the Rim Trail just then. He ran. They saw me and I waved."

"I suppose you can get some of those riders to testify to spotting you on the mountain-side later yesterday?"

Frankie's eyes burned. "Do you think I'm making this up?"

The Captain turned from her to the body. "I don't think you

are." He bent over. "The knife is precisely the sort served with my chops here this noon. Stainless steel, pointed."

"I wonder," Jim said slowly, "if it could be the one that was on my plate when it was stolen last night?"

"That's what I was wondering. Will you mind letting me take your fingerprints, Mr. Preston? Just as a check." He paused. "Whoever did it was able to carry a hundred-and-fifty-pound man from wherever it was done to here. Or drag him." He turned to the manager. "Can you close off this porch?"

"It would be awkward, under the circumstances. It was bad enough to have Poling shot. But this—and under a table where twenty guests had been playing games all evening!"

"I'm very much afraid you'll have to. Before any more persons muss up the room we'll send experts through it. Take a day, anyhow."

"Very well—" Mr. Howard was beaded with perspiration.

Herb Willet spoke for the first time. "Can we go now?"

"Certainly." The Captain addressed Mr. Howard, "I'll want to interview everyone who was on duty around here last night—late, I mean." Then he said, "You can go, too, Mr. Preston. I doubt if we can take

fingerprints at the local jail. But tomorrow, when the experts arrive—”

Jim nodded. He went out into the lobby with Frankie and her fiancé.

Herb said, “I’ll take you home, Frankie. Good night, Preston.”

The tall bony man walked off with the girl, out the door, and into the garden. As he went, Jim found himself speculating on whether or not Herb Willet could carry a 150-pound man.

Frankie walked slowly. Neither she nor Herb spoke. When they were within a few rods of her bungalow, he led her into an arbor covered by bougainvillaea. “You’re getting stuck on that swimming guy,” he said. “Falling in love with him.”

“That’s—!”

“Ridiculous? Look, Frankie. In trouble, a woman turns, not to the man who *can* help, but to the one she *wants* to help. Tonight when you had looked under the table, you turned to Preston.”

“I *wasn’t* going to say it was ridiculous. I was going to say that this was no time to discuss such a thing. If I do like him—what then? Dr. Galt—”

“Quite. Dr. Galt lies yonder with a steak knife in his heart. But I only wanted to hear you

say—admit—you found that fancy diver attractive.” There was a long pause. “A man,” he continued, “gets sick of being thought of as a jackass.”

“Herb! I don’t think of you as—!”

There was a sudden vehemence in his voice. “Will you marry me, then? Tonight!”

“Certainly not.”

“Oh. Right. Silly of me—”

Jim, who had followed them, pressed his body deeper into the black shadows of the vine. Frankie’s admission of interest in him was submerged in the recesses of his mind. The thing that occupied his startled attention was the change in Willet.

For a few moments he had been direct, emotional, nearly violent. Perhaps he had detested Dr. Galt for pursuing Frankie. Jim wondered if Frankie had ever flirted with Poling, the riding master. And he wondered if, by any chance, Herb had been out on the desert on that fatal morning.

Herb and Frankie left the arbor.

At noon the next day Jim was facing Captain Spencer and two un-introduced men from Los Angeles.

“Your fingerprints were on that knife, Preston,” the Captain said.

"Then it *was* the one swiped with my supper."

The policeman ignored that. "You never saw Poling alive?"

"Never. Alive or dead."

"You haven't any idea who tossed you in the pool?"

"None. My back was turned. And a man with soft shoes wouldn't make a sound on the tile."

"Nobody has been near you?"

"Only Sam."

"I've talked to Sam. He didn't hear anything, either." He eyed Jim a moment. "Sam's fingerprints were on the knife also. So it was the one on your plate, all right."

"I thought it would be."

Spencer thrust his face very unexpectedly into Jim's. "Suppose I told you, Preston, that I'd learned you *did* know Poling? That I'd found out what you had against Galt? That the fingerprints on that knife—yours—were in the position of a stabbing hand, and not a hand that is cutting meat?"

Jim was scared to his roots. He realized, with dread, that he was a stranger in this part of the country. But he looked back steadily at the policeman. "I'd say you were a darned fool."

"And I would be." Spencer glanced impatiently at his assistants. "But it was worth trying. I might tell you that I

have investigated you, and your record's perfect. I might add that your fingerprints were in the carving and not the stabbing position. Smudged. By a glove. The murderer probably tried to leave your prints on the knife—as much of them, anyhow, as he could—and still use the thing."

Spencer looked sleepless and irritable. "You're bright," he said presently. "You tell me what it's all about. Usually I look for some piece of junk that will tell me which one of several people killed the body. This time I have a mountain of junk—horse, saddle, bullet, knife, a letter G traced by a dying man to be a help and acting only as a hindrance, the plate your dinner was on—"

"You found that!"

"In a culvert on the golf course. Sure. We hunted for it."

Jim's eyes suddenly widened. "Look. Did you pump Dr. Galt's stomach to find out if he ate the meal?"

"To—what?"

"Well, maybe he stole my food because he was hungry, and ate it, and somebody stabbed him while he was eating—with his own knife. Or maybe the murderer deliberately snatched my plate just to get the knife. You could tell—"

Spencer grinned at Jim, then turned to one of his men. "Call

the undertaker and then send Dr. Cable over there. Have 'em report at once."

They sat in the office and waited. It took a long time. Finally the report came back. Spencer answered the telephone. When he hung up, he said, "Empty. So your plate was swiped to get the knife."

"But to look as if it were for the meal."

"Yeah."

"I wonder where the food went?"

"Probably down the culvert. Water runs through it, you know. It's the stream from Blind Canyon. But what does that prove?"

"Nothing," Jim said thoughtfully, "except that the man who killed Dr. Galt was plenty ingenious. He knew Galt was hanging around the hotel. He knew he was going to kill him. So he threw a coin in the pool to get me to the edge to swipe my dinner and make it look as if Galt himself had stolen it, but really to get a knife that had somebody else's fingerprints on it."

Spencer answered, "You find me a motive, and I'll get the murderer, no matter how slick he is. I think we ought to look into the private lives of the doctor and the riding master, very thoroughly. And then of everyone who knew them. How

about that Willet, for example? He's a queer duck. Didn't Galt chase his fiancée?"

"I don't know," Jim answered. "These people live a little bit differently from any I've known."

Spencer chuckled. "You ought to see how they live in Hollywood! Well—thanks, Preston. Keep your ears open. And thanks, also, for the idea of finding out whether or not Galt had eaten. It's interesting, but it doesn't do us any good to know he died hungry."

Jim walked to the employees' dining room. He did not feel hungry. Sam appeared soon after he sat down. "The soup is thin today," he said. "The stew is good. I recommend the veal, though. Did they give you a third degree?"

Jim grinned. "Bring anything... Yeah. We both signed that knife with our fingers."

Sam nodded pleasantly. "I'm lucky. At nine I go home."

"Where do you live?"

"On the desert. Near Marble City. I got a house. I've worked for the hotel for ten years, and saved. Bought me a little home and a car. And my break was being away. Captain Spencer worked for three hours this morning on the boys who stay at the hotel. They came out sweated through."

Jim laughed. Sam went out, and came back with breaded veal cutlet, vegetables, and salad. Jim had been thinking. "You say you've been here for ten years?"

"Since the place opened." Sam's amiable face became sober. "And I've seen plenty. Not only in the picture crowd."

"That's what I was figuring. You probably know the Farnham-Bailey people pretty well. You probably knew Dr. Galt and Poling."

"I did." Sam moved closer to Jim. "And if that cop hadn't torn into me the way he did, I could have told a lot."

Jim pretended only moderate interest. "Such as what?"

"Take Miss Bailey. Now, she hates her stepfather."

"Does she? I've noticed that she always calls him *Mr. Farnham*."

"That's it. She doesn't like that big guy. Take Mr. Willet. He hated Galt. I think, personally, that he's nuts. Always following people."

"Really? Who?"

"Everybody. I've seen Mr. Farnham go past my place on the desert on one of his hunting trips maybe thirty times. And like as not, soon afterward that Mr. Willet would tag along on his trail. He'd follow Galt, too. And he'd ask questions of the help, plenty of questions."

"About what?"

"About the other people here. He's a screwball. He's engaged to Miss Bailey. Why doesn't he marry her? Why'd he chase Miss McKay last season?"

"The movie actress? Did he chase her?"

"They got to be mighty good friends. I tell you, Mr. Preston, if I was that cop I'd want to know where Willet was the other morning. I'd ask him so many questions he'd get dizzy."

"Why didn't you say all that to Spencer?"

"I did—some of it. But he was so tough he got my goat."

"Suppose I dropped a bug in his ear?"

Sam shrugged. "I was thinking of telling him, anyway."

Jim went back to the pool. Galt's body was going East after the inquest, the second in four days. The verdict of that inquest was pretty sure. Person or persons unknown. People came to swim, and remained to whisper to each other.

In the middle of the afternoon Mr. Howard dropped over and privately asked Jim to do all he could to divert the hotel guests. People were checking out. The Los Angeles papers were playing up the murders in banner headlines. Reporters were arriving on chartered planes.

Jim contributed what he could by diving until he was weary. Frankie didn't show up. But late in the day Herb Willet strolled down to the pool. He waved languidly at Jim. He took off his beach robe, lay down in the sunshine, and stayed there until the other bathers had left.

The opportunity to talk to him alone was welcome to Jim. Nobody had questioned Willet. Willet was an extraordinary and subtle person. So, eventually, Jim walked around the pool and sat down beside the knobby, prostrate form of Frankie's fiance.

Willet said, "Hello, Preston" and closed his eyes wearily.

Jim looked away, his face strained with anxiety. "I was thinking about Dr. Galt," he said presently.

"So was I—not surprisingly."

"Any guest at the hotel could have stabbed him," Jim continued. "An outsider would have had trouble getting into the grounds."

"True. The fence around the place. And the watchmen."

Jim felt the excitement of his ambitious undertaking. "Any guest. Take yourself. Suppose you'd wanted to do it."

Willet smiled superficially. "Suppose I had."

"Well—suppose you hated

both Poling and Galt, for private reasons. Suppose you knew Galt went out often before daylight with his .30-.40. Suppose you got one like it—waited for a morning when Galt was out and Poling was riding. Shot Poling."

"Wait up, there. What if Galt came in with an unused gun?"

"What was to prevent him from reloading it—or even swabbing it out?"

"Right-o. You're smart, Preston."

"This is just to line up—a hypothetical person." Jim halted, and wondered exactly what Willet's continuing and slightly impertinent smile meant. "All right. You find out that Galt lost his gun—a pure accident, but a break for you. Galt is out in the bush. So you locate him. You pull a fancy trick to get my steak knife. Later that night, when Galt is prowling around here, probably to get food, or maybe to get you, you stab him. Somewhere near the porch.

"Then you see the night watchman's light somewhere out on the grounds. So you heave Galt onto the porch—just to hide. While you crouch there in the dark you notice the table shelf. You put the body there. It's shielded by the tablecloth so that you practically have to be on your hands and knees to

discover it. Then you go to your bungalow and turn in."

Willet inhaled smoke, blew it out, and looked up. "That's about how it happened, I venture to agree. Now, Preston, why do we do all this bloody business?"

It was time for Jim to use his facts. He looked up at the sky instead and said idly, rapidly, "You did it because you're jealous. Because Frankie flirted with Poling and Galt. Because Galt came here every winter and tried to take her away from you. You did it because you're psychopathically jealous and suspicious of everybody near you. You're unbalanced. Because you are even jealous of me. Because you charged Frankie with falling for me only last night—when she hardly knew me.

"Because, Willet, you're a homicidal maniac, and it's been growing on you for years, and the fact that Frankie won't have you for a husband has finally touched you off. Don't get up! Don't move! I'll clip you where you sit if you budge!" Jim spoke with abrupt alarm, for Willet was grinning at him in a manner which, under the circumstances, was manifestly insane.

"All right," Willet said, "I did it. Now. How do you prove it?"

Jim stared at him. He had neither proof nor witnesses to this confession. "I'll just ask you to come over with me to see Spencer. You can tell him."

Willet began to laugh. He sat where he was. Presently he said, "See here, Jim, I didn't do it. I said I did just to make you see one thing: you'd never be able to prove it, short of forcing a confession. But where did you find out all that stuff about me? I imagine you tagged after Frankie and me the other night." His face clouded for a moment. "But the rest of it?"

"Never mind," Jim said. He was watching Willet closely, unsure of whether the man was sincere in his amusement or skillfully evading him.

Willet's expression gradually became confidential. "Look. I'm older than you. Five or six years, anyway. I like you. I think I understand you. I think I know what it must be like to take all the bilge and insult from people like these and to be a mere hired man, when all the time you're a first-class engineer."

Jim stared.

"I *have* been investigating. And shadowing people. You included. And now I guess I've either got to give up my line of inquiry or take you in on it. I much prefer to do the latter. It would involve your silence, at

least until the air cleared."

"I can't promise it," Jim replied.

"I don't ask it—till you hear what I have to say. It's this . . . Four winters ago I met Frankie. She's a swell kid. Sincere, even-tempered, good-looking, normal—flirtatious, if you like. I love her. I don't think she loves me. Anyway, though, we became engaged. At that time her mother had just married Farnham. And Frankie didn't like Farnham especially. He's dull and domineering and aggressive. Very well.

"The Farnhams were planning to take Frankie to Florida one winter, and I, naturally, was going, too. Suddenly they switched plans and came here. So I did, too. I couldn't figure why Farnham wanted to go to the desert. He doesn't ride well. The hunting's nothing extra. I wondered about it frequently.

"Then Dr. Galt showed up, and has showed up every winter since. Apparently because of Frankie. But do you think a man of his attainments and temperament would give up a big practice for months every winter because he was hopelessly crazy about a girl? I wondered about that. I wondered, when I found out about it, why Howard worked every winter as hotel manager, when he's worth a couple of million."

"Is that the truth?" Jim asked with astonishment.

"It is. Though he doesn't make any open parade of it. All right. Here were three important and wealthy men hanging around here season after season for no really good reason. So far, so good. But there's more. Arlina McKay hung around so much she lost two fine contracts in Hollywood. And Mrs. Voight stayed here one winter when her brother died in Chicago and when her mother was ill to the point of death just over in Tucson. I figured that there was some attraction I wasn't getting."

"I can't agree," Jim answered. "I think that's your imagination."

Willet nodded. "So did I. But—for four seasons Farnham has kept a hundred thousand dollars in cash in the safe at the Paradise Canyon Hotel. Galt has a letter of credit for seventy-five thousand every year he comes out, though he spends, at the most, only a small fraction of that. Mrs. Voight keeps a tremendous account in the local bank. So does Howard—quarter of a million. Miss McKay, also—"

"Why?" Jim asked.

"I don't know, but I've guessed. Galt, Farnham, Howard, Mrs. Voight, and Miss McKay—all had a fortune on

tap, in cash. So you might think they were all prepared to *buy* something. What? Well—they were all horseback riders and hunters. They all kept scouring the landscape.

"Well, I followed all of them at one time or another and from the way they habitually behave when they think they're unobserved, you'd guess they were hunting for a lost object. Now, Jim, what in the world is there in these millions of waste acres of sand and rock that would make—?"

"Gold!" Jim exclaimed softly.

Willet looked at him thoughtfully. "So. Am I crazy? Or a murderer? Or—is there something going on here that involves, not my jealousy, which is real enough, but five rich people who have been waiting and hunting for years, unknown to each other, for something they stand ready to buy the minute they find what they are seeking."

"You mean, they're trying to find a mine, or something? And when they do—"

"They'll be all set to buy the land it's on from whoever owns it. I think that each one of them is convinced that there's a tremendous fortune somewhere out on that desert. Most of the desert is owned—by somebody—ranchers, old prospectors' claims, estates. So they want to

be ready with cash to purchase it—when and if."

Jim said, "Did Poling keep a big account, too?"

"I could never find out about him. If he, also, was on that gold hunt every winter, and had available cash, he kept it at his ranch or buried somewhere."

"Why did they always hunt in the winter?"

Willet gazed at him. "I wish I knew."

"Why didn't you ask, point-blank, any one of them?"

Willet got up and pulled a chair close to Jim and sat down. "That's not hard to explain. First, I merely marveled. Then I followed Farnham. Saw him ride out and stop and stare sliently all over the desert, and come back without firing a shot, saying the hunting was lousy, but fun.

"Then I observed that other people were doing the same thing, or something similar. So I entered the hunt. I didn't know what to look for. I don't think they know. They never refer to maps. They just tool along on foot or horseback, staring everywhere.

"Howard, by the way, has tried all sorts of mechanical ore locaters. If you don't believe this story, I'll show you where he caches them, out in the sand. I enjoyed it. I was near Frankie,

outdoors, and I learned a lot about the desert. Sooner or later, maybe even this winter, I was planning to get them all together and blow the whole business wide open, just for fun, at a dinner or something. Then—Poling got killed. You see?"

"See what?"

"I connected that instantly with this gold business. This patient, secret hunt. Then Galt. I thought it meant—"

"That somebody had discovered the mine!"

He nodded. "So I kept quiet."

"But—you can't!"

"Why not? I'd like to see the murderer caught."

"You've got to tell the whole thing to the police."

Willet looked grimly at Jim. "I don't want to. You can compel it, of course, but see here: this murderer's clever. Don't you suppose he had a solid alibi ready in case of need? And suppose the papers get hold of my yarn? Why, the desert will be crowded with thousands of people overnight. They'll come here and dig. They'll hunt. Do you have the faintest idea of what a gold rush is? To let this story out would mean that hundreds, at least, would break their hearts and lose their last few dollars."

Jim was silent for a minute.

Then he said, "You have a car?"

"Sure."

"Would you mind showing me that cache of Howard's?"

Willet grinned. "Good going! I stuck it in deliberately. If you had swallowed the story without any proof I'd have been disappointed in you."

They drove through town. They turned into the desert on an unpaved road. It petered out in divergent streams of horse tracks. Presently they were driving on hard sand and gravel, dodging cacti and mesquite and sage. The sun had dropped behind San Ferdondo.

Willet took a bearing from a slag pile and a distant canyon. He stopped the car. On foot they proceeded through the lavish colors of sunset to a small dune. At its foot, in the dry brush, were half a dozen packing crates, bleached and empty. Jim looked at them. They were addressed to Howard.

"Dig about there," Willet said, pointing with his toe.

In five minutes Jim dug up a carefully wrapped instrument. Its manner of operation was as undecipherable as its function.

"An electric diviner," Willet said. "Works with dry cells. All those gadgets are phony."

They stood side by side. Jim

suddenly—and shockingly—wondered whether Willet had brought him there to kill him. He looked at his companion's face. But Willet was staring toward the color-drenched clouds.

Jim felt weak with relief. The guy was sound, after all. Suddenly a dazzling thought occurred to him:

"Tell me, Willet—Herb—did any of those gold-hunters ever lie down?"

"Lie down? They crouched. A man standing on the desert is pretty conspicuous. So they were continually dismounting. I never got near enough to see them lying down. Why?"

"But they *could* have been lying down?"

"Sure. Farnham and Galt were always squatting behind something or other. Maybe lying. I couldn't say. But why?"

Jim didn't reply. His eyes ranged along the rocky miles of San Ferdondo's slope. "I believe your whole story," he said finally. "And I'll help you on it. I'm sorry I tore into you this afternoon."

Willet smiled. "That's all right. Darned amusing. And—nervy. How could you have known I didn't have another knife? We were all alone."

"M-m-m. That's what I was thinking just a few seconds ago."

Willet laughed heartily and slapped Jim's shoulder. "All right. Now—we've got to watch day and night, and do a lot of first-class thinking. If we don't get anywhere in a few days we'll have to tell the police. Where do we begin, do you think?"

"Let's talk to the desert rats. All of them. Pump them about the old legends."

"I have, to an extent. But we can try further."

They started back to the car. "Another thing—" Willet said, and paused awkwardly.

"Yes?"

"Frankie. She's more or less excited about you."

Jim was embarrassed. "She's a pretty fine girl. But I hardly know her. And—"

"I just wanted to say—I'm pretty fond of her. But I want you to know also that she probably doesn't love me. And if she ever does fall for anybody that guy'll have to become either my best friend—or my bitterest enemy."

Jim didn't say anything. Herb Willet had been too earnest for any reply. He looked now toward Jim, meeting his eyes with an expression that was friendly but deeply concerned.

On the day after that, at the second inquest, the verdict of

an unknown murderer was eventually arrived at.

In the forenoon of the day following the inquest Jim learned accidentally that Mr. Howard was going for a ride.

Jim wanted urgently to see one of the "gold hunters" on the quest, so he closed the pool, under the pretext of cleaning it, borrowed some riding clothes from Herb, hired a tranquil nag, and rode out in the wake of the hotel manager.

Mr. Howard merely took what seemed to be an arbitrary direction, although it was probably one in which he had not previously searched, and went over the country slowly, often dismounting to examine the terrain.

Jim returned to the hotel at 2:30, weary and hungry. He took a shower, started refilling the pool, and went to the kitchen for something to eat. The chef was in an irritable mood, so he asked for his friend Sam. The chef said that it was Sam's day off, or that the day before had been, and if people wanted to eat why didn't they show up at mealtime?

Jim started into town for food and found Sam asleep in a chair in the sun on the employees' porch. He had a newspaper over his chin and chest and had been snoozing for so long that his exposed face

was sunburned, but when Jim woke him he amiably rallied cold chicken and iced coffee.

Mr. Howard didn't get back from his search until four o'clock.

Mrs. Voight left in her car for a trip to Los Angeles. She said she was going to remain there for the weekend. After she had gone Herb dropped over to the pool.

"Mrs. Voight," he said, "had a camping outfit in her car when she drove away. Don't you agree, Jim, that she's probably not going to L.A.?"

Jim said, "Did it ever occur to you, Willet, that the hypothetical person who may have located the hypothetical mine may be intending to kill his rivals in the search one by one? Poling, then Galt. I followed Howard to have a look at just what you'd described, and I half expected all the time he was scanning the countryside that a rifle would crack and he'd fall from his horse. If Mrs. Voight is really going to camp out somewhere and make a furious effort to find the missing mine, she's doing it at a mighty unhealthy time."

Herb nodded. "I suppose she is."

Together they watched the sun go down. At last Jim said, "I have one idea—maybe foolish. I'm not going to

explain it now, because it isn't ripe. But if I need help I'd like to feel free to call on you."

"Anything. Any time."

"Buy a raincoat."

"A—what?"

"I've got a raincoat. I'll lend it to him," Frankie spoke from a spot behind their chairs. "What's the idea, Jim? Raincoat? What are you planning?"

Herb grinned at her. "A hunt. For ducks. Jim says they sit all over the Salton Sea in rainstorms. Want to join us next time it pours?"

"I'd love to," she said. "Anything to get away from the glooms. And now it's worse. My stepfather broke his arm this afternoon."

"Where?" Jim asked casually.

"Oh, out walking. He said he was restless this morning and went out in the baking sun to walk it off. He came in all bandaged up."

Herb and Jim looked at each other. Their eyes were expressive. *Perhaps* Mr. Farnham had broken his arm. *Perhaps* it was not a break. *Perhaps* it was—a bullet wound, for example.

That evening Jim went into town to several cafés, and he met two of the oldest living inhabitants of the desert. At the cost of a few drinks he was overwhelmed with stories of the

gold rush. A giant nugget lost, a mine in a cavern, a mine that ran under a graveyard, and a river that ran underground—so many stories that Jim realized it would be impossible to sift from them the one which was being investigated by the guests of the hotel.

He walked home late and went to bed.

On the day after, Frankie came to the pool to swim and stayed all the morning. She and her mother and Herb invited Jim to have lunch with them, and Sam served it on bridge tables beside the pool. The sky was bare of clouds, the sun blazing hot, and Jim had the first long opportunity to talk to Frankie, as well as to consider his own feelings about her.

Their meeting on the night of his arrival had been an enchanted adventure. In the hours of alarm that had followed, she had often looked to him for courage. He had expected that, and it had made him proud. And now, all day, talking to her, lying in the sun, diving for her, playing in the water, he could see glimpses of a deeper radiance in her gray eyes which existed there because it must also be in his own.

He was in love; and he had never been in love in that way before. Over his possessive and

complex desires hung the shadows of death, and between him and the girl stood a man whom he liked increasingly as his acquaintance grew.

When the long gorges in the sides of San Ferdondo filled with blue dusk Frankie left reluctantly, and Jim was sad at her departure. Any distance between them would, from now on, make him feel purposeless.

Captain Spencer walked up to see him. "Want to chew the fat a while?" he said. "Asked you to keep your ears open—remember?"

"Sure. But nobody's said anything hereabouts that would interest you."

"M-m-m. Nice day. Hot." He sat and viewed the panoply of desert twilight. "Haven't picked up a thing, eh?"

"No. Have the police?"

"No."

"Why don't you start something? As far as I can see, all the cops do is eat and sleep and draw their pay." Jim grinned. "Isn't there any routine you can use in things like this?"

Spencer yawned. "We haven't been loafing all the time. Like to ask you a couple of questions."

"Sure."

"Why'd you follow Howard out on the desert yesterday?"

Jim was surprised. "How do you know I did?"

Spencer sighed. "I was right behind you."

"Oh."

"And where'd you go with Herb Willet the other night?"

"Out on the desert again."

Spencer's head moved imperceptibly. "I can take you in, and ask you all this officially, you know."

Jim pondered. "I wouldn't have anything to say if you *did* hold me."

"I know it. I just hoped you'd help me out—because I also know you have some sort of hunch."

"I tell you what—I have. I admit it. But it's too daffy to give you now. If I get hold of anything that clinches it, or makes any sense, I'll spill it immediately."

Spencer was silent for longer than Jim had been. Finally he said, "Why do all these people spend their winters out there with the tarantulas, Preston? That's what you've guessed, isn't it?"

"You know about that?"

The officer was gently sarcastic. "I haven't your brains, of course, but—your friend Mrs. Voight is out there now."

"I thought so."

"In Alto Grande Canyon. And Farnham's broken arm—it isn't broken."

"No?"

Spencer fished in his pocket. "Here's the bullet the doctor took out of it." He flipped it to Jim. "A .30-40. Same gun that killed Poling. Farnham offered the doctor a thousand bucks to substantiate his broken-arm story. The doctor hurried to me." He rose. "Sure you don't want to tell me what your hunch is—yet?"

"Positive."

"Or why you want Herb Willet to buy a raincoat?"

"You listened in on that!"

"From the chlorinator shed." Spencer began to walk away, slowly and peacefully. "I'm giving all of you plenty of rope. That's my routine—in such cases."

Jim thought that he laughed, but he was not sure.

Two days later the weather changed. When Jim woke up, it was pouring. In those two days the murders of Poling and Galt had remained enigmatical.

Jim went down to the lobby in the elevator. The night clerk was eating his pre-retiring meal.

"When did the rain start?" Jim asked.

"About one."

Jim went to the phone and called Herb Willet's bungalow. "I think it's going to pour all day, so that lets me off duty at the pool. How about that duck hunt?"

"I'll be ready in a quarter of an hour. Pick you up in front of the hotel."

"Better meet me somewhere else. Say, the caddy house on the golf course."

Jim put on old clothes—and an oilskin coat. He tramped through vertical sheets of rain to the deserted caddy house. A car slid up, and for a moment he was frightened. It wasn't Willet's sedan. Then he saw Frankie at the wheel. He hopped in, dripping.

"The barnacle gathered I was up to something," Herb said. "She stuck. It's just as well. My car wouldn't start."

Frankie, in the blue raincoat which she had offered to lend her fiancé, turned from the wheel. "Where do we go? And what are we looking for?"

Herb winked at Jim. "A gold mine," he said. "Which way do we go, Jim?"

"North."

Frankie turned into the main road. Jim looked back through the rain. No other car was leaving Paradise Canyon on their trail.

"You don't mind," Frankie said, "if I'm faintly amazed? A gold mine?"

Herb chuckled. "All right, darling. Let me explain. Our young friend, Mr. Preston, is a gentleman of considerable intelligence—"

"You can skip that. I know it."

"And—an engineer."

"Engineer!"

"An honor graduate. Now—for reasons we haven't time to detail, he and I feel sure that various persons hereabouts have been gold-hunting for some years."

Frankie was vastly excited. "So that's it! That's why my stepfather insists on the desert every winter!"

"Exactly. We are at the moment assuming a lost mine. Our bright young friend knows that the hunters have no maps. He knows they hunt only in the winter season. Why, he has said to himself, do they hunt only in winter? If they never refer to maps there must be some *other* way of locating the assumed treasure. If they hunt only in winter, it must be locatable, so to speak, *only* in winter.

"What, he asks himself, happens in winter and not in summer, spring, or fall? It rains, says his massive mind. But are these people looking for a stream? No. Then what? How about an *underground* river? Suppose they are not *looking* but *listening*? I didn't get the brilliance of the hunch, even when he asked me if I'd ever seen any of the searchers *lying down*, ear to the earth, till he told me to buy a raincoat."

Jim replied diffidently, "It's a loony idea, but—"

"Loony? It's genius! You are absolutely right! Our friends have scoured the local desert listening for a subterranean gurgle that will, according to some antique yarn, double or maybe quadruple their already ample funds. By golly! They're looking for the Golden Gregg! The mine in a lost cavern!"

Herb was staring open-mouthed at Jim.

Jim said, "I think so. Don't you suppose that's what Poling meant by the G he drew on the sand? I've been wondering, if he had lived a few seconds longer, whether he wouldn't have marked down two G's and an arrow or something."

"You think he found it?"

Jim nodded.

"But where are we going?" Frankie asked.

Herb replied to that question. "Ask the Professor. He's an engineer, remember. That doubtless means something of a geologist. What *is* the compass bearing, anyhow, Jim?"

"I'm not sure. But I've taken a pretty good squint at the mountain and the land around here. I'd say there were two spots in this neighborhood where you might expect an underground river. One's below Red Water Canyon. And one's right under the west pass."

Frankie was shaking her head affirmatively. "And we're going to cut across to Red Water?"

"And get out," Jim answered, "and slog."

They got out. And slogged. For an hour. Then two. Finally four. Their feet became heavy with wet sand. Rain ran down their necks. The visibility was so low that it was difficult for Jim to reconstruct the theoretical path of a possible underground watercourse. When they wandered any distance from the glistening side of the mountain, it was lost to view. When they finally gave up, they could not locate the car.

And it was while they were scrambling through the wet brush hunting for the car that Frankie suddenly stopped dead-still and then threw herself down in the mud.

There was no doubt of it. The sound was sonorous, liquid, eerie, and it made the ground tremble a little. She yelled.

Herb ran up from one side and Jim from the other. They dropped to the earth. They listened. Herb rose silently.

Frankie said, "Now what, Professor?"

Jim looked through the rain toward the mountain to take bearings. Then he grinned. "Maybe we're right. Probably

nuts. But assuming we're right, we can assume that at least one person found this spot. According to the Golden Gregg yarn, there was an entrance to the cavern. Whoever found this place may have found the entrance and, if so, probably covered it. Shall we carry on? Or quit?"

Frankie wiped wet hair out of her eyes. "Carry on."

Herb smiled. "Got any ideas, from your lessons, about where to look?"

Jim nodded. "That's easier. Can't be far. Water's worn this spot thin. We're standing on a dome. Look for piled-up rocks or recently cut brush, or anything disturbed."

Jim, himself, found the opening—a crack in an exposed ledge, three feet wide and about two feet high. A barrier of stones had been built in front of it, and the stones were covered by recently transplanted cacti. Jim called the others. He had rolled away the rocks when they arrived.

They all regarded it without speaking, awed, afraid. Jim took a flashlight from his pocket. "I'll go in," he said.

"Me, too."

He shook his head at Frankie. "Not today. You two watch. It may be impossible to explore down there with so much water. I'll see."

She grabbed his arm. Her voice was suddenly imploring.

"Please wait! Suppose—"

"Suppose there's a man in there," Herb said. "Yeah. Better wait."

Jim hadn't thought of a possible occupant. He knelt. "I'll take a quick look, anyhow. If I'm not back in ten minutes get the cops."

He went in. His flashlight showed a rapidly widening tunnel with a dry floor. Within fifty feet he could walk upright. A sound overhead frightened him. He shot the light up. A bat whizzed past his ear.

The tunnel dropped. The floor became rocky. The water sounds grew deafening. Then he reached a turn and rounded it. He stood at the edge of a cavern too vast to be plumbed by his light.

Its floor was white sand. Great shining stalactites hung from its ceiling. Through its center a black river roared in a deep channel. Near the river were some rotten planks and rusted pieces of metal. Fresh footprints marked the sand from the place where he stood to the debris, and the sand itself glittered with myriad minute fires in the light.

Jim faded back into the shadows. He filled his pocket with the sand, then went back the way he had come. Only

then was he terrified. He began to run.

When he emerged in the daylight he found Frankie crying on Herb's shoulder. She shouted when she saw him, and threw her arms around him for a brief, relieved instant.

Herb's anxiety melted into interest. "What?" he asked.

Jim said tremulously, almost hysterically, "It's it. The Golden Gregg, I guess. There are ruins of a sluice down in there. And the sand—" He held out a handful.

They bent over it. "Are those specks gold?" Frankie whispered.

"Yeah," Jim said.

Herb looked at him. "You know where this is, don't you?"

"Oh, sure. We'll find it all right. And we better cover it up exactly as it was."

"I mean—this is on Poling's property. Poling's ranch."

They stared at each other. Then they covered the cave mouth carefully and hunted until they found the car. They started back toward Paradise Canyon.

"It looked—inexhaustible," Jim said.

"M-m-m," Herb answered.

"The sand's rich. And the river may have carried miles of it under the earth."

"Wasn't thinking about that."

"Oh." Jim gazed at Frankie. His face was depressed and speculative.

Herb saw the expression and said gently to the girl, "Look, Frankie. It's going to be tough on your stepfather."

"My stepfather!"

"I hate to say it. But he was looking for that mine. Galt was: Your stepfather had a date with Poling the day he was killed. Suppose it was to buy Poling's ranch and not to arrange a trip. Suppose Poling wouldn't sell. Suppose Galt found the cave that morning, and Farnham was hiding in it."

Frankie slowed the car. "I can't believe that!"

"Farnham's a tough, quiet, acquisitive man. And remember—I know why you don't like him—"

Frankie shrugged. "Just because he is beastly to his employees doesn't make him a-murderer."

"No. But—"

"We'll let the police decide that, anyway—won't we?" she said.

Herb turned. "Think we ought to tell the cops—yet, Jim?"

"No."

Frankie said angrily, "You've got to! You can't hide all this information!"

"Just for a day or two—" Herb's voice was reserved.

"If you don't, I will!"

Herb ignored that. He said to Jim, "I'll talk to Farnham. I think the best way will be to give it to him quietly—"

No one spoke again.

Jim was thinking. Farnham? It certainly looked like Farnham. But there were others: Howard, Mrs. Voight, Arlina McKay, the movie star . . .

It was late afternoon. Dark. They drove under the archway that led to the grounds of Paradise Canyon Hotel.

"You change," Herb said to Jim, "and come over to my bungalow. I'll sit on Frankie. And I'll have some food sent over. I'm starving."

Jim went to his room. He had a hot shower, then put on dry clothes. His face was set, thoughtful, grim. In the lobby he saw Mr. Farnham. His heavy form was relaxed in a deep chair and his eyes were on the pages of a novel. For the convenience of the guests there was a rack of umbrellas at the door to the gardens. Jim took one and ran through the rain to Herb's bungalow.

Herb was still bathing. Sam brought in and set up a bridge table. Jim talked through the open bathroom door.

"I just passed Farnham in the lobby. He was getting a terrific stack of bills from the cashier. I wonder what for?"

"Great Scott!"

"Yeah. And he ordered his car."

"No kidding."

"Going to have it call for him at the bungalow in half an hour."

"I'll get a wiggle on."

Sam brought in a tray of covered food and a portable heater. Herb came out and tipped him. He and Jim sat down at the table. Jim was watching him attentively. "I think—" he said.

Two minutes after Sam left they had run through the rain to Farnham's bungalow. There, in the dark living room, Herb seated himself. Farnham had not come over from the hotel. Jim was hiding behind a portiere.

Then the door opened. Footsteps approached through the murky hall. Sam came into the living room. He was still wearing his white waiter's uniform. But he was no longer a waiter. He held a revolver in his right hand. Jim jumped.

But he missed. A moment later Sam was whispering tensely, "Up! Up! Both you guys! Now, get over in the corner there!" He started toward them slowly. "I'm going to knock you both out. I gotta."

The front door creaked again. More footsteps. Frankie

switched on the light. She saw Sam covering Jim and Herb. Sam's face grimaced and he whipped his gun toward her. "Come here!"

She stood, paralyzed, beside the switch.

"Come here! Now, look. You're tying those guys up. Then you're coming along with me. In your car. Get it?"

Frankie nodded her head.

Sam was panting. "I'm on the spot. I'm leaving. You're going with me. If anything happens to me it'll happen to you first. See? Now. Work fast. Use those portieres—"

There was an instant of stiff pantomime. Then a shot snapped it. Sam's gun fell to the floor. He cried out and grabbed his wrist. Captain Spencer walked into the room, grinning . . .

Two hours later, in the presence of Captain Spencer, Jim, Mr. Howard, and a stenographer, Sam had finished his confession. Sweat-soaked, nursing his wounded wrist, he sat back in his chair.

Jim spoke, "If I can't be of any more use, Captain, I'd like to go to dinner. They're waiting for me."

"Go ahead. And—thanks. Thanks plenty. If you ever need a job as a detective—"

Jim grinned. "Don't thank

me. If you hadn't showed up when you did—”

“What did you expect me to do after I found that you and Willet and Miss Bailey were missing? Sit around until you came back? You see, I rather thought that you and Mr. Willet had a hand in things. Not flattering, but—”

Jim's grin widened. He went out of the room and through the garden. The rain was only a thin sprinkle and a fresh breeze was stirring. Soon it would be clear. He entered the Farnhams' bungalow. He was enthusiastically greeted. A long table was spread with silverware and china, and only Jim was needed to complete the party.

They sat down. But nobody was eager to eat. Farnham put the question that even Herb had been impatient to hear answered. “How in the name of creation did you come to suspect the waiter?”

“It went like this,” Jim answered a little wearily. “When I was taking a shower this afternoon I got the water too hot, and nearly burned my face. That reminded me that I'd seen Sam with a sunburned face a few days ago. It dawned on me that the thing was odd, because Sam's a busy person. He couldn't have had time to sleep on the porch long enough to get a bad burn. Besides, his

chin was under a newspaper, and hadn't been sunburned at all.

“I thought—suppose he was faking sleep and faking the burn. How, I wondered, would a guy burn his face in the sun, and not his chin? And why would he want to make it look as if it had happened some way it hadn't? It struck me that about the only way it could be done would be to wear a false beard all day. I thought that was funny—for a minute. Then I didn't think it was so funny, after all.”

“But why would he wear a beard?” Mrs. Farnham asked perplexedly.

“That's what I wanted to know. I recalled that the chef said that the day before had been Sam's day off. Look: if Sam had been out on the desert all day in a false beard, and was working the nap-under-a-newspaper to alibi his partial sunburn, it meant that Sam had declared in on the whole business.

“Then I thought a lot of things. In the first place, Sam was the one person nobody had investigated who could have done both murders. He lived outside the hotel grounds, so no one could have checked up on him the morning Poling was found. He went home at night at various times, so he might

easily have been around here when Dr. Galt was killed.

"Then, he had just left me that time when I was pushed into the pool. I thought of the ten years he has spent here. And I wondered if he hadn't possibly lived a double life, by establishing himself—disguised as one of the desert rats—around town nights, and if he hadn't used that disguise when he went hunting for the mine. As a waiter, he could pretty well keep track of the other gold hunters. And as a desert rat—in a beard and sunglasses—he could hunt himself.

"That was right, as it turns out. Sam had been hunting for that mine for four years. He found it. He said he had savings and that he tried to *buy* Poling's ranch, but that Poling liked the place and wanted to keep it.

"A few mornings ago Sam went over to Poling's and told him about the Golden Gregg and asked for a ninety per cent cut on all the profits. Poling said no. He got on a horse and started to town. Sam shot him, on the way in, from ambush. Probably he figured he could buy from Poling's estate.

"Then Sam drove away to take a look at the mine—and got there just as Galt was coming out. Galt didn't see Sam. Galt had stumbled on the

cave when he cut back to hunt for his rifle. Captain Spencer found that gun, by the way, long ago. He knew Galt had not killed Poling. But he kept quiet. Spencer's pretty tricky."

Jim drew a long breath. "Anyway, I figured Sam was the murderer. He also knew Galt had found the mine and was hunting for his gun. He knew he'd have to kill Galt. Sam hid on the grounds here, and stabbed the doctor when he slipped in late at night.

"When I came over to Herb's place this afternoon, and Sam was there, I just yelled into the bathroom a few hints that would make Sam think that you, Mr. Farnham, were about to do him out of a chance to get Poling's place, and the Golden Gregg. Then Herb and I waited in your bungalow for Sam to appear. Only—I guess I'm not much of a murderer-catcher."

Jim paused. "You see, if he'd gotten away, by using Frankie as a hostage, he could have dropped her and left the car, and turned himself into a bearded hermit whom everyone around here knows by sight. In other words, Sam would have vanished; and the man who killed Poling and Dr. Galt would never have been caught. Though Sam would perhaps not have gotten the Golden Gregg.

Maybe he'd have worked it *secretly.*"

Herb broke the long silence in which Frankie and her mother and stepfather were digesting that information. "The nerve of the guy! To kill a man with a knife that actually had on it his own fingerprints! If anything would serve to confuse suspicion, that would."

Jim nodded. "Sure. That's why he went to such pains to get it. He's inventive. As a matter of fact, there's been a lot of smartness used here. Spencer, for example, told me that you'd been shot, Mr. Farnham, and hadn't broken your arm. Did it just to jar me. He knew I knew something. He even showed me a bullet and said it had been taken out of your arm."

Farnham chuckled. "Barking up the wrong tree."

Herb turned toward the big man. "Tell me one thing. How come you started looking for the Golden Gregg?"

Farnham looked uncomfortable. "It seems foolish now. And almost criminal. But remember when Mrs. Voight was getting up a gold-panning party a few days ago? Well, I went on one three years ago. By George! They were all on that party—Howard, Miss McKay, Mrs. Voight, Galt, myself—and Sam was in charge of the

victuals! Funny I never thought of that!"

"Anyway, there were about twenty of us in all, and it was pretty exciting to see the yellow sheen in the bottoms of those pans. The streambed we worked—or, rather, played in—had water in it only during the rainy season, and nobody knew how it was fed. Underground springs, the guides said.

"Then, that night, we had entertainment. A cowboy played a guitar and sang some songs. And one of the old-time prospectors told his stories. Among his stories was the one about the Golden Gregg, and he had minute data about it—how it had been found by a prospector who heard the gurgle of water, and so on.

"Well, such stuff gets you. It occurred to me then and there that the underground springs where we were camping were the outlet from the cavern that hid the Golden Gregg. The gold we were panning was just a water-borne sample of the gold in the cave."

"I made up my mind to do a little listening out on the desert for underground water. So, evidently, did five more people present that night. I began to be obsessed with the idea that somewhere out in the desert were millions, maybe hundreds of millions, in gold."

"Of course, I guessed that it was the same thing that attracted Galt here each winter. Once or twice we hinted toward it, but we never really discussed it. Then, when he was killed, and Poling, I naturally felt—"

"Let's not talk about it any more," Mrs. Farnham said to her husband.

"Let's not," Frankie agreed.

At nine o'clock the rain stopped. Frankie grew restless. Finally she said, "Jim, take me for a walk."

Her mother looked at her protestingly. Jim's heart beat hard. He turned to Herb questioningly.

The tall and bony man smiled—sadly, perhaps, but gamely. "Go on, children. By the way, Jim, I'll want you to sign some papers tomorrow."

Jim was looking into Frankie's eyes. "Papers?" he echoed. "Papers?"

"Yeah. The reason I was still bathing when you came over to my bungalow this afternoon was that I'd been getting off some telegrams. I had my lawyers buy Poling's ranch—at least, they've already got an

option. It's in your name—and mine."

"What!"

"Sure. You found it—for your half interest. I bought it—for my half. And you'll have to be in charge of operations—I don't know enough about engineering to fix a tire."

He walked up to Frankie and took her hand. "Have a swell walk," he said softly. "And look: I'm leaving Paradise Canyon tomorrow or the next day."

"Leaving!"

Mr. and Mrs. Farnham showed their surprise. Jim turned his head away.

"Yeah. Got to rush to Florida. A guy down there has turned up eleven new ligulae that I don't have in my collection. So it's up to me to push out in the Everglades pronto and catch up with him."

"Oh," Frankie answered. Suddenly she kissed Herb. Then she took Jim's arm. They hurried out into the night. There were tears in her eyes. Across the gardens a breeze blew, from the rain-freshened vegetation, the scent of jasmine. She took Jim's hand.



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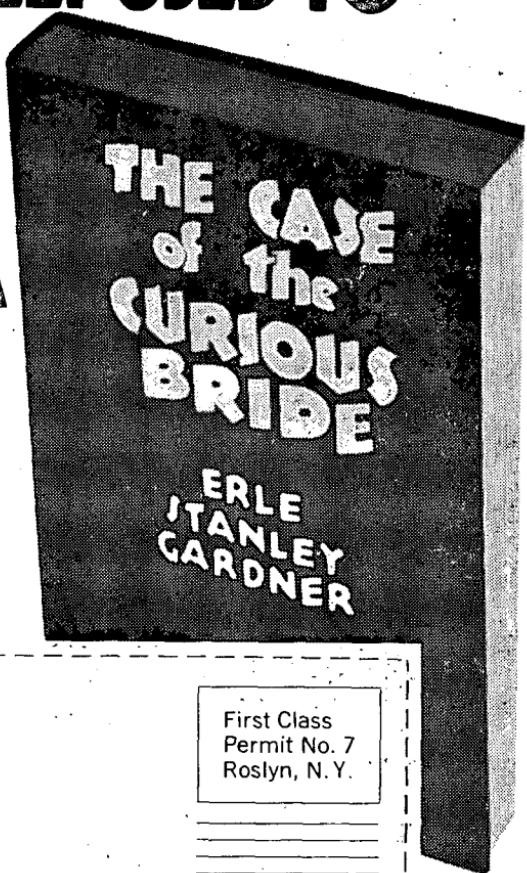
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